

## 438 (days drifting at sea) by Jonathan Franklin (2015)

Salvador Alvarenga [SA] was a fugitive from El Salvador [on a hit list for a murder he did not do]. He was a shark fisherman from Costa Azul, Mexico [southern end]. The area had been overfished & they would have to go out further each year. At this point they were out 80 miles from coast. This type of fishing was very dangerous & they lived a party life as an outlet. They made about \$75/day.

SA & his mate Ray left shore on 16nov12 in his 25' fiberglass boat with over a 1000 lbs of gear [mostly gas] as normal. They next day they came back with a load of fish. Ray took too long running an errand so SA hired a day laborer named Cordoba [C]. He was told a storm was coming but was not concerned. C was sea sick from the start. They pulled in half of the fish before they had to head back due to a storm bailing & fighting 15' waves all night.

15 miles from shore the engine died. His GPS did not work, but he called in SOS. Then his radio battery died. Someone took their anchor and now the winds from the Gulf of Mexico & the ocean currents pushed him out to sea [18nov12]. A search party was sent out for 2 weeks but couldn't find them. Most of their supplies were swept overboard & fish were tossed out to lighten the load. They used a sea anchor [line of empty bleach bottles] to align with waves.

They would find shelter in the ice box from the sun & cold but it was crowded. At first, they were drifting 75 miles/day. Other ships were in sight but their little boat was not visible ½ mile away. Fish, sharks & birds were attracted to the boat. He learned to catch fish, birds & turtles with his hands. They collected rain water & stored them in bottles [& 55-gal drum] found floating. He drank his urine once but it made him thirstier.

He would break a wing of birds to keep them from flying away but to keep them alive until another day to eat. They need the rain but it also made them cold. They would 'chum' the water with fish guts to help catch more fish. He made a hook from a part on the motor & caught a mahi-mahi but lost it soon after. One day flying fish landed in the boat.

Raw bird meat was risky & it smelled of rotten fish. SA would tell stories to encourage C. By January they were drifting at 1 mph in the Doldrums. C was depressed & tried to throw himself to the sharks, but SA held him down. C died 15mar13. SA talked to the corpse for 6 days before throwing overboard. A week later SA thought about killing himself but told God he wouldn't.

One of the birds laid 2 eggs. Once a month he would quickly bathe in the ocean. A whale shark [bigger than his boat] traveled with him for a week. SA imagined reuniting with his daughter. When lightning came there was no place to hide but it did bring rain. He put urine in his infected ear & it got better. He had no sun glasses & his back always hurt. He was constipated & he put bait in a bleach bottle then grab a small shark's dorsal fin & club it after landing in the boat. The shark's oil was a laxative.

He scratched his name on the metal bands of some small birds & set them free. He used a dried puffer fish as a soccer ball with his flock of birds. One bird became his friend until there was no other food. He spent months in an "ocean eddy" where the waters are calm, the food

plentiful & it rained a lot. It made him happy. It only took 5 hours a day to gather food here. After 6 months his clothes were shredded. He rehydrated, put some weight back on and his water & food stores were well stocked again.

When he left the eddy, he was back on rations. Humor & optimism are vital to survival but he was exhausted & started hallucinating. A ship came within 50 yards, waved & kept going. Once he jumped overboard to get something but soon realized he didn't have the strength to swim & got back in the boat. Many times, he lived in this false reality. In his mind he brewed coffee every morning & go for a bicycle ride. When he got back, he would be a god father.

He was back in the Doldrums, but God sent tuna & rain. After 400 days he was so weak he couldn't walk. He saw distant lights, but they faded away. 29jan14 he saw coconuts on the water & shore birds. He dropped feathers in the water to project his route forward. He was headed straight to an island [Ebon Atoll, Marshall Islands] but traveling at 2 mph would take most of the day. 10 yards from shore he jumped out & crawled to shore. He should have secured his boat but didn't.

He fell asleep under a tree but the rain made him shiver. He longed for the security of his icebox. In the morning he heard a rooster & was found by Emi & Russel. They carried him home & gave him food, water, a sponge bath & clothes. He was glad they were not cannibals. Russel retrieved his boat. He saw himself in a mirror & broke it. Police took him by small boat [reluctantly] to a government building.

Lack of communication was frustrating. A patrol boat took him to Majuro [Marshall Islands capital]. Police verified his story & arranged a 'skype' with his parents. A local journalist published an article & it exploded worldwide. He became a freak show. After 11 days he flew to El Salvador only to be put in a hospital again. It was the first time he flew & it terrified him.

His daughter was thrilled to see him but she could see in his eyes that he wasn't there. He was hyper-vigilant & in a stupor for weeks. He went back to Costa Azul to pay his respects to C's mom & see his friends. He became the father he promised.

Timeline:

Day 8 = 500 miles; 28 = 1000 mi; 45 = 1500 mi; 76 = 2100 mi; 126 = 3100 mi; 196 = 4400 mi; 366 = 5500 mi; 410 = 6200 mi; 438 = 6700 mi.

Note: US Coast Guard recreated the journey to set a timeline due to currents & wind. 71% of the Earth's surface is covered in water & the Pacific is the largest ocean. Eating protein creates ammonia that needs water to flush out of the body. Fish eyes are high in vitamin C. There is 20-mile visibility to the horizon at sea.

Quotes: "...people who get seasick are nearly always the first to die in a sea survival scenario" (Michael Tipton); "If one depressed person avoids committing suicide then the books is a success." (SA)

Books: Adrift (Steve Callahan); Essential of Sea Survival (Michael Tipton); Dark Waters [the expedition] (Jason Lewis); Waking the Tiger (Peter Levine);

Definitions:

50- roiled = shook

74- flotsam = debris

126- soliloquy = monolog

145- jetsam = debris

180- rookery = flock of birds

210- ruing = lamenting

215- agoraphobia = fear of open spaces

232- reedy = skinny

246- ceviche = a dish of fish, lemon, onions & peppers