

# Adrift by Steven Callahan (1986)

Steven Callahan (SC) built a 21' sail boat in 1980 called Napoleon Solo. The next year he sailed it alone from Newport to Bermuda then with a friend he sailed across the Atlantic to England. He started a solo race from Penzance, England to the Canaries & then to Antigua, but bad weather caused a leak & then got sick that forced him to quit in La Coruna, Spain. After repairs, he picks up a woman to crew & goes to Lisbon, Portugal & on to the Canaries where they depart.

No crew were found that late so he headed to the Caribbean on 29jan82. Within a week a storm comes down & 10' waves become larger. In the middle of the night there was a loud bang [probably hit by a whale] & water fills the cabin in minutes. He grabs his life raft & emergency bag. Think fast...what else? He throws his sleeping bag & foam pad but can't get to the water jugs or a food bag. 5feb82 he is 800 miles west of the Canaries & lost at sea.

His little raft is tossed about in the storm for days. He turned on his Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) [sends out signals for 250 miles] for a couple of hours just in case. He constantly has to bail out water & pump up his raft. He has 8 pints of water, flares, a sponge, 2 solar stills [water], knife, space blanket, first aid kit & various items.

Water currents are the Gulf Stream, Agulhas, Humboldt, South Equatorial, Indian Monsoon & Labrador. He is on the North Equatorial which moves about 9 miles a day. The wind can increase that to 25-30 miles a day [without sea anchor]. Sea anchors are used in rough weather to stabilize the boat.

Day 4 the storm settles enough to try the solar still. No good. The second the same. This is not good. His ration of ½ a pint of water each day will only last 16 days. He sees a whale. Day 6 sharks appear & bump the raft. Salt water ulcers begin to heal when dry. Dorado fish ate his only hook. Glad he still has his spear gun. He fixes the still enough to produce some water. Trigger fish is very bitter.

Day 14 another shark attack. He is glad to be in his raft. He sees a ship on the horizon & fires several flares. They don't see them & are gone. Each time he fishes he risks damaging his spear or raft, but he must take the gamble. Years ago he made a promise in a situation like this to hang on. He always dreams of food. Day 17 another ship, another wasted flare. Names his raft Rubber Ducky III.

Day 22 ten-foot waves get everything wet again. He bails out the water. Day 27 his spear gun trigger breaks & is now just a spear. He now has to squeeze 300 pumps of air into his raft each day [5x more than day 1]. Flying fish glide just above the water for about 100 yds [surface effect]. He pours salt water over his head to cool down. He must keep his mind together in order to survive.

Day 30 another storm. He loses a crown chewing on the tough fish skin but feels no pain. Parents notify Coast Guard [but cannot send a search without knowing location]. A fish must have nibbled a hole in his still. Bad weather doesn't allow fish to dry & it spoils. He guesses he is half way to the Caribbean. Day 40 the raft is guaranteed for 40 days of use. Hopefully more.

Day 42 he spears a fish right through the spine [no fight], but it sinks dead & wasted. He collects water when it rains, but the deteriorating canopy makes the water foul. Day 43 a large hole is ripped into the bottom tube of the raft. This not good. He keeps fixing it for 9 days while he sits in water & bails. Porpoises appear.

Day 46 he ties an old sail to the bottom of the raft. A flying fish lands in the raft. The dorados seem to be helping him as he loses strength by coming closer. Day 52 he yells "I want to live". He is exhausted & the smallest things set him in a rage or depression. He is constantly working on the still to get some precious water. The further west the more rain [rations are now 1 pint a day].

Day 56 [April 1] what a fool he is. He got food poisoning but survived. The distilled water isn't as pure anymore. Day 58 another ship that doesn't see him. His brother estimates to within 100 miles of him but they won't look. Ham radio operators do spread the word. There is more sea weed & with it comes tiny crabs & shrimp. There is also more trash.

Day 63 ship 7 takes another flare without returning anything. He seems to be over the continental shelf [land must be near]. Day 65 he grabs a bird that landed on the raft to rest. Another storm & with-it precious water. His crew [his body] begs for water & he yells back "shut up & stick to the rations". He agrees when they see a plane or land, they get an extra pint. The next day they see a plane & gets extra water. He turns on his EPIRB.

Day 71 the still finally quit. He hopes for rain but is depressed. Day 73 another ship another wasted flare. Rain is collected. Day 75 [night] he sees lights on the horizon. Can it be land? They celebrate with 2 pints of water. Day 76 [Apr 21] he sees two islands ahead & turns on EPIRB. He hears a small boat engine. The fishermen don't usually come out this far but they followed the birds to fish. They caught dozens of fish & a man.

They took him back to Marie Galante island [between Antigua & Barbados]. He could not walk. A man used his CB to tell a friend & the word raced around the world back to his parents within an hour. He has high sodium, low potassium & very anemic. They gave him meds, food, drinks, a bath, clothes & rest. The island is great. His parents arrive in two days & stayed a week. His body didn't like the spicy foods.

In 1800 miles nine ships could not see him. He lost 42 pounds. After several months his hair began to fall out. He has no recurring nightmares. He has more empathy for the millions who live in deprivation daily.

Note: He says vitamins are found in photosynthesizing organisms & scurvy takes 40 days to set in. With a sextant at the north pole the north star will be 90 degrees [d] latitude above the horizon & 0d at the equator. Each of the 360d longitude is divided into 60 minutes or a nautical mile [about 6000' at the equator]. 360d divided by 24 hrs is 15d [15 minutes of longitude per minute of time].

Quotes: "At sea I am reminded of my insignificance." "I write in my log that it is a view of heaven from a seat in hell." "It seems impossible, but many things that are hard to believe do happen." "The freedom of the sea lures men, yet freedom does not come free." (SC)

Books: Tinkerbelle (Robert Manry); Survive the Savage Sea (Dougal Robertson); Poor No More (Robert Ruark); The Old Man & the Sea (Hemingway); Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe);

Definitions:

- 26- quay = dock
- 46- jibs = forward sail
- 50- anomalies = irregularities
- 50- fiddle rails = shelf rail?
- 88- cetacean = marine mammal
- 127- antifouling = removing barnacles
- 128- flotsam = debris
- 130- harrumphed = clear throat audibly
- 153- hawsers = ropes
- 153- capstans = a crank to haul in ropes
- 159- refraction = deflection
- 165- shearwater = an ocean bird
- 178- combers = waves
- 181- flaccid = limp
- 194- deftly = skillfully
- 197- stamen = pollen-bearing part of a flower
- 220- amoeboid = one-celled protozoa
- 245- abominable = offensive
- 278- sargasso = gulf weed
- 285- conflagration = fire
- 292- athwartships = width of a ship
- 300- acuity = insight
- 303- indubitably = definitely
- 337- tepid = warm
- 339- gendarmerie = soldier or police