

# On bravery

Sailing across oceans would be classed by some as a brave act. Yet, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** notes, things are somehow more nuanced than that

suppose it must be true that sometimes it takes seeing yourself and your life through another person's eyes to admit and accept certain facts. I don't consider myself to be a particularly brave or intrepid person. Ten years ago I had never even set foot on a sailboat. And yet I have now lived on one for over eight years. I've crossed two oceans, sailed three quarters of the way round the world and given birth on three different continents. Yet, though it may not surprise you to hear it, I'm always taken aback when people say to me that I must be terribly brave.

I think that learning to sail is a lot about learning to assess situations and understand behaviour. Interpreting the behaviour of the boat, of the sea and of the crew. Reading the sky, the weather patterns, the coastline. Even having good spatial awareness of an anchorage or a marina slip all comes into play. And, starting out, everything about the sailing life was new to me. Everything was something to be discovered and practiced. But slowly each repeated task, each common situation, every similar passage became more and more second nature. I was absorbing all of these sailing moments into my experience, tucking them away into my memory for future reference like all those worn, dog-eared, well-thumbed cruising guides on the shelf in our saloon.

There is something very freeing about starting something afresh, knowing so clearly how very little skill and competence you have. In contrast it comes as quite a shock when you make the transition from being entirely green to being considered, at least by others, as somewhat of an expert. I remember being rather shocked the first time that fellow cruisers asked me for advice on some aspect of anchoring. My instinct was to double-check with them, as surely they couldn't think that my opinion, my capability was superior. And they responded by saying "But you've crossed the Atlantic!". I was still so concerned with all the many gaps in my boating knowledge that I failed to see the value and worth in what I'd already achieved.

Bravery is a rather big and loaded word to me, but it can exist on many levels. Just having the nerve to



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**JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN**

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at [water-log.com](http://water-log.com)

suggest buying a boat would've taken some guts. Setting out and sailing away from England in the first place must've taken a great amount of bravery too, though I didn't label it as such at the time. Each watery step along the way, our first night sail, those first few passages, the earliest big crossing, the initial year: each was so littered with almost microscopic sailing lessons that it's hard to resurface and look back on the sum of all these parts.

Because it never really felt like we were doing something that took guts or that we were being fearless or cavalier in some way. It was always more like small steps of learning and experience. We would make mistakes, we would anchor too close, misjudge the tidal height, sail too near to a cape, push the limits of daylight too far and arrive somewhere at nightfall. But even the mishaps

and blunders helped us no end. We started a separate boat log called "lessons learned" in which my partner James and I would record what had gone wrong in the passage just completed, how we could've done things differently, what we should do better or try another way next time. I think that it helped to keep us quite humble regarding our successes. And we were less downcast or perhaps just more forgiving of our failures.

There is a strange assumed air of authority that can surround anyone who writes about what they do. I've always liked to appear utterly transparent about what we've done, how we've been able to do it, openly admitting to just how much we tend to make things up as we go along.

It may be a terrible cliché but the saying that the importance lies in the journey rather than the destination is true of sailing. It is the same as going from hesitation to bravery, little by little, learning and stumbling, growing and adjusting.

Somehow the time moves on, and things just sort of creep up on you; it doesn't happen overnight, but you go from being a novice land-lubber to a valiant sailing mama of three. And I still make plenty of mistakes, I still get sea-sick and I still get the weather wrong at times. Maybe the only real bravery I can claim is that I'm happy to admit it.