

# LIFESTYLE

See what your stars have in store for you

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## Sailors recall big adventure across Atlantic with no GPS

Heather Wood  
Lifestyle Editor

In 1983 four Norwegians rented a 35-foot yacht and set off for the Caribbean. Bermuda was one of their ports of call.

Hauk Larsen Wahl and Morten Stødle recall how thrilled they were to find “this little dot on the map in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean” in their book, *The Dream of the West Indies: Four young sailors brave a long-distance voyage before the time of GPS*.

Mr Wahl, Mr Stødle and another sailor, Erling Kagge, were 20 years old at the time. Arne Saugstad was 18. None of them had experience sailing on the open sea. They packed a New Testament Bible, a sextant and charts, hoping that Mr Wahl’s year of military training would pay off.

On board was a huge supply of crispbreads gifted by Wasa, their Swedish sponsor, a collection of tiny Norwegian flags, two empty diaries and three SLR cameras.

“We did have, of course, parents who were nervous and trying to make sure that we were as prepared as possible, but I don’t remember them trying to block us,” Mr Wahl said.

“We all had some sailing experience. The whole plan was to do a round trip — from Europe, across to the Caribbean and then on the way back, it’s natural, because of the trade winds, to sail via Bermuda and the Azores and then back to Norway.”

Both he and Mr Kagge had sailed often with their parents as children and had experience on dinghies, windsurfers “and also some bigger 20ft, 30ft boats”.

“We were experienced coastal sailors as teenagers and also did some regatta sailing but we’d never really done any offshore sailing where you’re away from the coast for days,” Mr Wahl said.

“But we were old enough to make our own decisions. Several of us had already finished one year of military service so we were not living at home any more. I had this dream of doing this long-distance sailing trip. We didn’t look at it as particularly dangerous at the time, just as an adventure.”

Finding a boat was the most difficult part of their preparations. Eventually they rented *Jeanette VI*, “a beautiful Vindo



Friends reunited: Arne Saugstad, left, Hauk Larsen Wahl, Morten Stødle and Erling Kagge in 2021

50 single-master with aft cabin” from “a wealthy and cheerful travel agency owner”.

He allowed them to have her for roughly \$3,500 for their nine-month journey if they agreed to serve as his crew for his own three-week trip in the Caribbean.

“We got a really good deal from this gentleman and he got to fulfil his dream, which was to sail his own boat in the Caribbean without bringing it there,” Mr Wahl said.

To save time, they had the boat transported from Oslo and they cast off from Lisbon in September of 1983.

Their first stop, in early October, was Madeira, before they sailed south in planned coincidence with the end of the hurricane season.

Five months later, on March 23, they reached Bermuda.

“I’d never been to Bermuda. My father had been there on business some years before and he raved about Bermuda and how beautiful it was,” Mr Wahl said.

Low on funds, they made a successful appeal to the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club to keep their boat there for free.

“We gave the bartender one of the small traditional Norwegian flags that we had with us,” Mr Wahl said. “He hung the Norwegian flag in the bar; I think that bought us some free drinks.”

The group met “some fantastic local people” during the two weeks they spent here — the late sailor and businessman Warren Brown and his family,

Than Butterfield, Hartley Watlington and the late lawyer Nicholas Bayard Dill Jr and his wife Bitten, a Norwegian born not too far from where Mr Wahl grew up.

Erling Naess, a former chairman of the Anglo-Norress Shipping Company, was “a sporty” 82-year-old who had just won a tennis championship in his class in Bermuda.

Neither Mr Wahl nor his friends knew the Norwegian shipping magnate but contacted him on discovering he lived here.

“We were broke,” he said. “So we called him and said, ‘We’re here in Bermuda, but we have no cash. Is it possible to borrow some money from you?’”

Although Mr Naess was “very sceptical”, as his callers were obviously native Norwegians, he invited them to his home to “have lunch and talk”.

“By then we had used up pretty much all the cash,” Mr Wahl said.

With no money for the bus they were forced to take a taxi, and stick Mr Naess and his wife Elisabeth with the bill.

As a show of good faith, they gave the multimillionaire a packet of crackers from the free stash supplied by Wasa.

“He was a kind man, a good sport. He and his wife were really nice people and I guess we came across as honest chaps. We ended up borrowing \$500 from him that we paid back six months later. I think he was completely shocked when he got the money.”

It was in keeping with the

kindness they experienced during their entire stay here, he added.

“We were just completely amazed by the hospitality. We were 20-year-old guys and I guess we came across as innocent. Maybe people were curious as to why we were there so early because it was still March, wintertime, and I think most boats come in May or June, later in the season.”

The group left Bermuda on April 7 and experienced “a really nasty storm” between England and the Azores where their boat was “thrown to her side with the mast parallel to the sea” and “a freak wave” tore off the hatch covering the opening to the forward bunk leaving the cabin “like an indoor swimming pool”.

“We probably made the mistake of leaving too early,” said Mr Wahl.

A month later, they reached Norway to the delight of family and friends.

Mr Wahl returned to Bermuda in December of 1984 to visit some of the people he had met and to watch sailors training for the America’s Cup.

The following year, Mr Kagge sailed to Antarctica with Warren Brown on his yacht *War Baby*.

“I do want to go back to Bermuda with my wife, maybe with our kids, sometime,” said Mr Wahl, who earned a degree in petroleum engineering after his great adventure.

He then travelled the world with work and is now living in Houston, Texas, where he works in shipping and is “an active sailor, windsurfer and dinghy sailor”.

Much of the text in *The Dream of the West Indies* was taken from the diaries he and Mr Stødle kept on their journey.

“We brought those diaries out, wiped the dust off and started reading and we thought, ‘Man, we’ve got to have these stories in a book so that our kids can read it,’” he said.

“So we ended up basically, without much editing, writing this book; more or less what we had written in the diary supplemented by our memories.”

The book was written in Norwegian and translated by Mr Wahl “with my wife’s help”.

Both versions are available for sale on Amazon in hardback, paperback and as a Kindle e-book.

Attention has come following an interview by a newspaper in



Bargain boat: Jeanette VI

Norway and an article in popular sailing magazine, *Yachting World*.

“But the motivation was, let’s make a book out of these two diaries and our memories so that our kids can have something they can read about their adventurous parents,” Mr Wahl said.

Looking back, he is “surprised by the courage” they all had to “just cast off and sail”.

“There was no GPS at the time. We only had navigational maps and charts. We had a compass, of course, on the boat but the way we managed to know where we were when we were out in the ocean for two weeks was with a sextant. I had taken a course in celestial navigation when I was in the military in Norway and had to teach the other guys how to use it and do the calculations. So we navigated with very old-fashioned equipment. That’s how we found our way.”

Also amazing is just how unafraid they were to “explore, meet people” and ask for whatever they needed but did not have.

“We had an extremely low budget for the whole trip. So whenever we went into a town and we saw or heard there was a cruise ship that had some Norwegian connection we put on nice clothes, contacted the ship and [asked if we could] come on board and if they had any out-of-date food or drinks that they couldn’t give to passengers.”

On every occasion they walked away with “a cooler full of food and nothing was out of date”.

“We were amazed how kind people were. I think we had almost no bad experiences meeting local people; we were very lucky. Sometimes I read it and am like, ‘Is that me? Really? I did all this stuff?’

“As you age you become more cautious; your willingness to take risks is reduced — at least in my case. You just kind of go the more safe route with career and family.”

Mr Wahl added: “But back then we were broke and had this fantastic adventure — twice across the Atlantic. We got to see fantastic islands like Bermuda and met a lot of people, many of whom we still keep in touch with. But definitely a reunion in Bermuda, it needs to happen.”

•For more about *The Dream of the West Indies*, visit [transatlantic.no](http://transatlantic.no). The book is also available on Amazon

## Why does a healthy pet need an annual wellness exam?

A Vet’s Life  
Lucy Richardson



This is a great question, but don’t worry, I have a great answer for you.

Having your pet checked over at least once a year will improve their health, wellbeing, and life expectancy, and it will almost certainly save you money over their entire life span.

Let me explain. Your pets have different needs at different life stages, so for a vet to be able to assess each of the life stages provides critical information throughout their life. It’s like writing the textbook of your pet

year by year. A healthy animal can provide fantastic baseline knowledge for your vet so they can spot things easily should they change. At our practice we always work on the view that prevention is better than cure, and so by seeing the animal at least annually we can prevent problems before they begin.

The annual wellness exam is a fact-finding mission, and if done right, will build the bonds of trust between your pet, the vet and you as an owner. These three need to be working together to achieve the best harmony within the household.

The wellness exam starts from the very moment we arrive on the property. Vets are constantly gathering information, reading behaviour, and taking in the environment.

We have already gained a huge amount of information in the time it takes to say hello and walk into the room.

We then speak with you, the owner, to see if you are experiencing any issues or problems and catch up on any lifestyle changes. Finally, we ask the animal directly by performing a thorough physical exam. At the end of all this data collection, we have a comprehensive view of your pet’s life and health and can make recommendations for improvements as needed. These may include weight loss or gain, dietary changes, dental cleaning, flea control and a whole range of other things that will keep your pet living their best life. With cats, simple changes such as adding a second litter tray or



Wellbeing: get your pet checked at least once a year

moving the lookout perch closer to the window will make all the difference to their quality of life.

We also notice more subtle changes, such as mild pain as your pet ages, and can intervene with medicine or exercise adaptations. We sometimes find things that are hidden such as heart murmurs or abnormal

lung sounds and, as with most illness, early diagnosis is key.

When I think back to pets I have known as puppies and kittens, watching them grow into adults and then geriatric patients, the wealth of knowledge obtained at the annual wellness check has allowed me to really know them and their lifestyle, so I can provide a much more targeted and effective medicine if they do happen to become ill.

The hardest appointments are the ones in which you have a seriously ill animal with no prior knowledge of their health or lifestyle and you really have to start from scratch to understand what is happening. You are also trying to read their language while they are feeling poorly, or in pain, making the messages much harder to comprehend.

I really like to know my patients; in the same way I like my doctor to know me. When you’re with your pet every day, it’s sometimes hard to notice the subtle changes that are affecting their lives. The annual wellness exam is an opportunity to gain some valuable information about your pet, both for you as an owner, and for me as a vet, so we can work together to keep them happy and healthy.

•Lucy Richardson graduated from Edinburgh University in 2005. She started Cedar Tree Vets in August 2012 with her husband, Mark. They live at the practice with their two children, Ray and Stella, and their dog, two cats and two guinea pigs. Dr Lucy is the FEI national head veterinarian for Bermuda



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