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News

May 24, 2003

Sailor back at last, to cheers, hugs and a long-awaited pint

By James Spallone and K.D. Weaver



After stepping ashore and greeting well-wishers, Morgan displayed shells collected 100 years ago by the first circumnavigator, Joshua Slocum.

Solo circumnavigator Brechin Morgan of Milford, Conn., was greeted with cheers and hugs by more than 100 friends, family and well-wishers on Saturday, May 17, as he returned to the same Block Island dock that he sailed away from four-and-a-half years ago.

Morgan, 56, entered Old Harbor at 12:52 p.m., right on time for his scheduled 1 p.m. landing. Sailing under a tiny storm trysail in the 20-knot-plus easterly breeze, Morgan triumphantly sounded the boat's horn as he neared the dock. Applause, balloons, cheers and clicking cameras greeted his approach.

Morgan's voyage, in a 27-foot cutter-rigged Pacific Seacraft, took him to six continents, to tiny islands in Micronesia and across vast seas. Small flags from more than 50 nations decorated the rugged little boat named Otter.

He appeared tanned, thinner about the waist and more confident than when he left Block Island in November of 1998. That departure, like his arrival, was marked by windy conditions and high seas. But unlike the triumphant return Saturday, Morgan left the island without fanfare, promising then to return to celebrate his accomplishment with a pint of Guinness. Morgan lifted that pint at the National Hotel overlooking Old Harbor a few hours after



Morgan tosses a line to a family member upon his arrival in Old Harbor.

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An artist and retired sign-painter, Morgan made the voyage on a shoestring budget. He painted watercolors throughout the journey, selling several to help offset his costs.

Morgan set out to see the south Pacific and experience different cultures. "This vessel was a vehicle to do it," Morgan said as he stowed his gear. "During this trip, I made a connection to sailors from long ago and far away."

Morgan said the roughest weather he encountered all trip was during the first three days, between Block Island and Bermuda.

During the latter stages of the journey, Morgan sailed in the Arabian Sea, visiting Muslim nations like Eritrea and Yemen. "One to one, people are all the same," he observed. "People are very welcoming. I was befriended by many people."

In this era of global strife, Morgan said one lesson he brings home is, "It's a small minority making the problems in the world. That's true everywhere."

Among the well-wishers were his wife, Sandy, who visited him at various ports along the way, relatives from Washington and Arizona, First Warden Martha Ball and friends from as far back as his seventh-grade class.

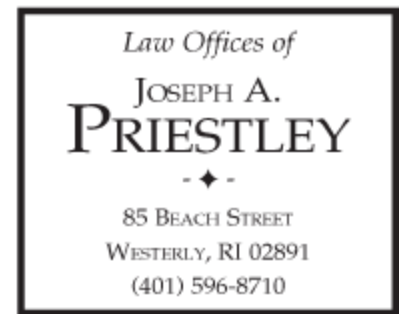
Sandy took in the ceremonial first line thrown from Otter. Morgan's parents, John Brechin Morgan, of Old Saybrook, Conn., and Alice Morris of Deep River, Conn., made fast the second line. Morgan's father, a lifelong sailor, taught him to sail small boats on Long Island Sound. Morgan's brother John of Waterford, Conn., who had kept family and friends abreast of Otter's journey via email, was also on hand, having organized the welcome-home party.

As a guitarist played and sang nearby, Morgan bounded up a ladder onto to the dock, where there were hugs and kisses all around. There were few dry eyes in the crowd.

Todd Peters, a schoolmate, traveled to Block Island from Seattle for the occasion. "It was his life dream, even when we were kids, to sail to Tahiti," Peters remembered.

After the initial greetings, Morgan displayed a bottle of shells collected by the first solo circumnavigator, New Englander Joshua Slocum, who completed his journey in 1898. Slocum gave the bottle to Brechin Morgan's grandmother, his father explained. Morgan carried the shells with him throughout the trip.

In a brief ceremony at the National Hotel that afternoon, Morgan was inducted into the Golden Circle Club by the commodore of the Joshua Slocum Society, Mike Martel. Martel noted that the Golden Circle Club is an exclusive group consisting only of sailors who have made a fully documented solo circumnavigation of the world.



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"It is a tremendous personal achievement that tests you mentally as well as physically," Martel noted as he handed Morgan the Slocum Society's red-checked burgee and the long-awaited pint of Guinness.