

WHEREFORE ART THOU, DON?

Don says questioning dreams will either stop you in your tracks or see you constantly cruising the globe

So many things in life are just “because”. If you have to ask “why?” then maybe you will never really understand the answer anyway. I mean why would anyone want to sail solo around the world eight times in 21 years, three of those racing, one non-stop, one against the wind, and the last taking three years to complete at the age of 77?

My mother used to drive me batty when I was a kid with those infamous words, “because I said so”, if I ever asked “why?” So, eight times solo? Well, why not! And so he did! That person is Minoru Saito, the unstoppable Japanese sailor with the cheesy grin.

I built him his boat *Shuten-doji II* in 1990. It eventually sailed 210,000nm on the first seven of those solo

voyages, without any major failure. I replaced the rig on voyage four.

Saito and I go back a long way together, to when he first started sailing in 1985 at the young age of 50. I helped him buy his first boat in 1986 (yacht designer Joe Adam’s very own 13m with a two-cylinder inboard petrol engine to save weight) and we had an influence on each other. He made me smile and I told him about adventure — but I just had a shocking thought, I may have forgotten to tell him about anchors!

Life can be so full of whatever you want. None of us can really complain, as we control our own destiny, right? Yes, of course you are doing just what you want to, right? That job you have is the one you

planned, worked for and deserve, right? Your work-life balance is perfect, you are doing just what you want. No regrets. Or could you be asking yourself: “What am I doing?”, and maybe even “why?”

Minoru rang me in Tarawa (Kiribati) on his satphone within hours of finishing his “final” epic. We laughed together and looked

back on some amazing times. Here is a guy controlling his own destiny. I did not ask him “why?” — it is not in our vocabulary in relation to life choices.



Margie and me with Minoru Saito in Hobart (top), after sorting “a few problems” on *Shuten Dohji III* early in his eighth solo circumnavigation. He has now sailed the same distance solo as from earth to the moon! Tobias Fahey (above) onboard his new boat, a “special” deal from me and a new solo challenge for him. Watch this space!

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We may spend this Christmas together in Hobart, watching the Sydney Hobart Race fleet sail in with our feet up. He and I have never sailed that event, whereas so many people have done more than eight — we may very well look at each other and ask “why?” But I doubt it.

WHY ME?

My boat *ICE* has a John Deere (JD) engine, highly regarded by many,

and it has an injector pump like all diesel engines. They very rarely fail. Mine failed in the first 20 hours, pump No.2 failed at 900 hours while at sea. I fitted the spare (pump No.3) while drifting toward a reef. It failed in 21 hours!

We sailed back to Tarawa for repairs. Three months later, following \$7000 in bits and 10 DHL express shipments, I’m still stuck here on a bad mooring growing coral on the hull. (See *Battle for Tarawa* in *Trade-a-Boat* issue 418 or visit the www.bluetreasure.me blog).

We needed special “custom” JD tools to complete the job, which escalated in complexity as pump

No.3 became stuck on the engine. JD had no tools for sale for three months! The JD agent in Taiwan sent the wrong parts. The JD agent in the USA ultimately sent the wrong custom tools (which were kindly sold to us from the tools used at the JD Service Training School), damaging parts. And when we finally got the engine back together, injector pump No.4 was faulty from new! So now I am fitting pump No.5. Hmmmm...

I hope to be making noise in the engineroom in a few days, thanks to the efforts of Bill and Stella from Seahorse Yachts in China (builders of *ICE*) and Steve Shale, the JD agent in Australia. Steve is the only guy to have inside if you buy or own a JD engine. He is involved, knowledgeable and really good. I know the engines are okay... I bought one. But “why me?”!

There is a saying for all mariners, that you are never actually going anywhere, as you never know where you will end up — you are always bound for your destination...

I am now bound for Fiji, but it is all up to No.5, and we should be leaving soon!

WHY NOT!

It is so good to be a little crazy sometimes, even if it means making plans that never eventuate. I do it all the time. It starts as a dream, progresses to an idea that could turn into a plan, that can fade or catch fire, thereafter consuming every ounce of my time and money. This will often lead to buying that special boat for that special adventure. My accountant, for 27 years, has tried to get me concentrating on one project at a time, but, hey, life is short. Problem is I see so many special boats.

I desperately wanted to sail the Jester Challenge (a solo race, with no rules, across the Atlantic) back in 2010, so in 2008, I bought a special North Atlantic 29, sight unseen in Nova Scotia. It was junk rigged and designed by Blondie Hasler (of *Jester* fame) as a larger version of his classic.

Sometime later my plans changed, so I suggested to friend Chris Bray (son of *Trade-a-Boat’s Cruising Around* columnist Andrew Bray) that he buy it at a special price and sail it through the Northwest Passage. He did and is now halfway through. (You can follow that grand adventure at www.yachtteleport.com).

In October last year, I did it



My sight-unseen-purchase halfway across the world — a North Atlantic 29, a very *special* boat.

again. I bought back one of my own boats — for 20 per cent of what I sold it for eight years before. It was one of three unique boats I built in our factory at Taree, NSW. It was originally designed to race around the world solo or two-up, but modified for the owner, who then wanted it for sail training.

It is a true 15.2m Southern Ocean rocket, built incredibly strong with five watertight compartments, and a rudder and keel to last. I had visions of doing another circumnavigation in a few years, just to enjoy the ride. Jessica had got my imagination peaking again, anyway, my plans changed. Now I really wanted a young person to get into this boat.

Tabias Fahey was young and had sent me an email some months before (after reading these columns) about a yearning to challenge himself, solo around the world. It was a dream too strong for him to let go. He had just bought a 36ft

cruiser-racer to “fix up”. I called him suggesting he needs to buy this boat at a special price and do it. He did and is. He is one of those courageous big-wave surfers in Tasmania and has real passion. He sets off next year, so follow him on www.tobiasfahey.com.au

He is not going to be the youngest, or oldest, but so what! Why not!

SADLY WHY

Kiribati is dying as a result of Global Warming, sinking into the same sea that is the life of the people. The world watches on, waits and speculates. Life is looked upon differently here than in our Facebook society. A boy was hit and killed by a truck on the only road a few days ago. Police arrived in the ute, put him gently in the back and drove him home. He was buried alongside the house he was born in, not to far from the well that is the water supply.

MAYBE THE ANZ COULD PROVIDE A FREE EPIRB WITH EVERY LOAN CONTRACT, BUILDING IT INTO THE REPAYMENTS

Nothing is exported from this place, only imported. International aid comes in and consumerism started some years ago. The ANZ bank is here and locals use Australian dollars. Fishing is part of family culture and tradition. Some sail at dawn, returning at dusk each day in handcrafted canoes, while others now go to the ANZ bank, apply for a loan and buy a boat to begin a whole new adventure with outboard motors.

The standard fishing kit is a plywood runabout with 30hp Yamaha and a crew of three. They set out every evening at dusk, returning at dawn to sell the catch. The boats are mortgaged to the bank and the pressure is on to make repayments (and profits to get the car, the fridge, TV, etc) so they sometimes fish in bad weather. They are outside the lagoon and if the engine dies, it is a long way to New Guinea in the prevailing wind.

If 2800 people died fishing in Australia in just three months, do you think it would make headlines and politicians would take note? If you scaled up the population of Kiribati to Australia's that is what has happened here during my three-month stopover. One lost canoe, four lost runabouts, 14 people missing.

When a boat reports missing, an Orion surveillance aircraft is usually despatched from New Zealand (sometimes from Hawaii or Australia.) Just one flight can cost more than \$80,000. The fishermen have no real safety gear and EPIRBs are like diamonds in a place where virtually everyone lives on rice, fish, coconuts and breadfruit.

Maybe the ANZ could provide a free EPIRB with every loan contract, building it into the repayments. There is no easy answer, but it gets worse! A local official tells me that November, December and January is the peak search-and-rescue season. People here seem to accept it as a part of life? Sadly, and just maybe, we should ask “why?” 🚨