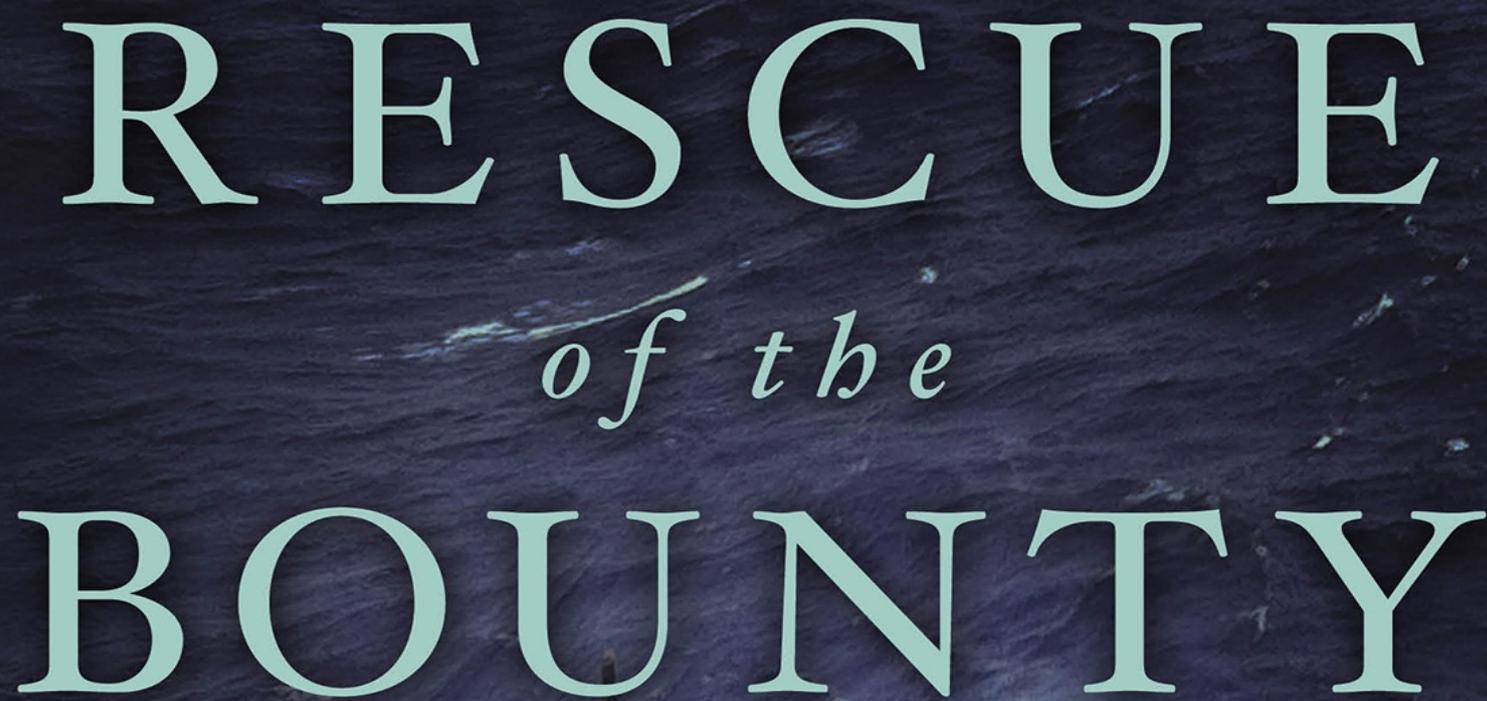


"Tougas is a master of the weather-related disaster book." —*THE BOSTON GLOBE*

# RESCUE *of the* BOUNTY

An aerial photograph of the USS Intrepid, a three-masted sailing ship, navigating through a dark, turbulent sea. The ship is viewed from above, showing its complex rigging and masts. The water is a deep, dark blue with white-capped waves, suggesting a storm or heavy weather. The ship's hull is a reddish-brown color, and it appears to be moving through the water, leaving a white wake.

DISASTER AND SURVIVAL IN  
SUPERSTORM SANDY

From the Author of *Fatal Forecast* and *A Storm Too Soon*

MICHAEL J. TOUGIAS AND  
DOUGLAS A. CAMPBELL

**Thank you for downloading this Scribner eBook.**

---

Join our mailing list and get updates on new releases, deals, bonus content and other great books from Scribner and Simon & Schuster.

[CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP](#)

or visit us online to sign up at  
[eBookNews.SimonandSchuster.com](http://eBookNews.SimonandSchuster.com)

RESCUE  
OF THE  
*BOUNTY*

DISASTER AND SURVIVAL IN  
SUPERSTORM SANDY

MICHAEL J. TOUGIAS  
AND  
DOUGLAS A. CAMPBELL

SCRIBNER

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

# CONTENTS

## PART I

- Chapter 1: The Speech
- Chapter 2: The Storm
- Chapter 3: A Voyage with Purpose
- Chapter 4: The Captain
- Chapter 5: A Happy, Happy Crew
- Chapter 6: Becoming Robin Walbridge
- Chapter 7: Joshua's Story
- Chapter 8: A Vigilant Watch
- Chapter 9: Keeping *Bounty* Afloat
- Chapter 10: A Leaky Boat?
- Chapter 11: From Trucks to Tall Ships
- Chapter 12: An Aging Actor
- Chapter 13: Past Her Prime, Lost Her Prime
- Chapter 14: Mutiny in Her Blood

## PART II

- Chapter 15: Alone
- Chapter 16: Landing the Unquestioned Captain
- Chapter 17: Questioning the Captain
- Chapter 18: Oh, the Water
- Chapter 19: Problems Everywhere
- Chapter 20: Unseen Punches
- Chapter 21: The Dangerous Hours
- Chapter 22: A Rushed and Urgent Call
- Chapter 23: The First Raft
- Chapter 24: The Second Raft

## PART III

- Chapter 25: One Small Strobe All Alone
- Chapter 26: A Swirling Vortex
- Chapter 27: Like We've Flown Back in Time
- Chapter 28: Catapulted

Chapter 29: Flipped Like a Pancake

Chapter 30: Running out of Time

Chapter 31: Held by the Sea

Coast Guard Investigation

Afterword

Photographs

Acknowledgments

About the Authors

About Michael J. Tougias and Douglas A. Campbell

To all the librarians who have helped my writing and speaking careers. Our public libraries are national treasures.

MICHAEL TOUGIAS

To those who loved Robin Walbridge and Claudene Christian and who now grieve.

DOUG CAMPBELL

# PART ONE

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE SPEECH

The autumn afternoon was perfect, untroubled on the New London, Connecticut, waterfront. The rippled river water sparkled; the blue sky was washed clean as fresh laundry. The late-October sun came low behind the woman's right shoulder, casting sharp, long shadows before her. For twenty years Beth Robinson had been part of the engrossing world of tall ships and she still thought, *This is why we go to sea, days like this*. She walked onto the City Pier, where, ahead of her, a crew of sailors hustled to their assignments on deck below the three towering masts of the historic square-rigger *Bounty*. Robinson, a relief skipper on a nearby schooner, knew the ship, a 180-foot, fifty-year-old wooden ship—an expanded replica of the original 1784 ship HMS *Bounty*. She made a casual inspection, passing the soaring sixty-foot bowsprit, thrust upward toward shore, before reaching the freshly painted black hull. She knew *Bounty's* captain, too, Robin Walbridge, and thought her friend of two decades had his boat looking pretty good.

Robinson had come to see Walbridge for just a passing hello.

"Hi, Captain," she called out.

Walbridge gave a similar greeting—nothing elaborate. He, like Captain Robinson, was native New England stock, a taciturn man who saw eloquence in one's work and ideals, not in words or attire.

Walbridge mentioned that *Bounty* was preparing to leave port, but the exchange was brief as the captain was focused on a serious problem and had urgent business to attend to.

During the day, several of Walbridge's fifteen subordinates had received text messages or phone calls from family and friends who knew the ship was set to embark on its annual southward voyage, heading for a winter dock. The callers were concerned about a hurricane, brewing in the Bahamas and heading north, named Sandy.

A twenty-five-year-old crewman, Joshua Scornavacchi, had received a text message from his mother in Pennsylvania. She was worried about the storm. "I'll be fine," he replied, adding that *Bounty* had been through rough weather before.

Another twenty-five-year-old got a worried text message from her mother on Cape Cod. The young woman, a maritime academy graduate, was not concerned, though, nor were most of the other crew members, many of them considered "green" sailors as far as experience aboard *Bounty* was concerned.

However, among the more experienced crew, there were worries. The chief mate, John Svendsen, forty-one, now in his third season aboard *Bounty*, had spoken earlier with his junior officers. The third mate, Dan Cleveland, on board *Bounty* five years, and the bosun, Laura Groves, on board three years, had doubts about sailing offshore toward a hurricane. The second mate, Matt Sanders, was moderately concerned. The

conversation convinced Svendsen that he needed to talk with Walbridge and present the captain with options.

Svendsen knew that the New London City Pier, which projects out from the west bank of the Thames River, would be exposed to heavy weather by way of Long Island Sound, which lay two miles south via a straight path of open water. *Bounty* was moored to the exposed south side of the dock, where the fetch to the Sound invites trouble. Svendsen knew that if *Bounty* remained where she was and Sandy arrived, the storm's winds and surge could race up that fairway, presenting the possibility of serious damage to the ship.

Svendsen, who had become aware of the hurricane two days earlier, thought there were better choices than heading offshore. *Bounty* could simply sail farther up the Thames to where the US Coast Guard Academy's tall ship *Eagle* had docked. *Bounty* could sail east, to where the city of New Bedford, Massachusetts, had a hurricane barrier—a stone wall across its deep harbor. *Bounty* could also sail farther north, to Boston. Svendsen even thought sailing toward Bermuda, 650 miles to the southeast, might be an option.

• • •

From the moment the crew awoke on Thursday, October 25, 2012, *Bounty* had been crammed with activity. The crew was preoccupied with more important considerations than their coming departure. Company was expected—special visitors. *Bounty*'s owner, a wealthy Long Island businessman, had invited the crew of the navy's newest submarine, the *Mississippi*, for a daysail aboard *Bounty* on Long Island Sound.

Soon after daybreak, the crew was busy preparing. One team washed the decks. Two hoses were neatly stowed on deck: one to reach forward to the bow, and the other to extend to the stern. On the ship's third and lowest deck, down a set of stairs and then a ladder, two diesel engines powered electric generators whose most important function was to run the electric bilge pumps that kept the ship afloat. Without pumps, like any other leaky wooden boat, *Bounty* would eventually sink.

Below the floorboards of the third deck, which housed crew quarters and fuel and water tanks, pipes and hoses extended from the two pumps to the bilge space. The hoses sucked up water in the bilge space and discharged it amidships back into the sea. But the process could also be reversed and seawater could be sucked up into the deck-washing hoses. As the team used this seawater that bright autumn morning, one team member noticed something different, troubling. Instead of a powerful stream, the washdown hoses gave him barely enough spray to wet the deck boards. Normally, the pressure in the hoses would be too high if some of the water wasn't diverted overboard. Yet this morning, even using the full capacity of the pump, the crewman could not fully charge the hose. He mentioned the problem to his two teammates, who seemed unconcerned, and then reported his observation to the ship's engineer. In the end, the pump problem was ignored.

• • •

The sun was high when the crew from the *Mississippi* arrived at the City Pier. *Bounty*'s owner, Robert Hansen, and her captain, Robin Walbridge, greeted them. Then *Bounty*'s crew cast off the dock lines and, engines running, pointed her lancelike, uptilted bowsprit south on the Thames.

*Bounty's* crew led the visiting submarine sailors as they climbed aloft in the 111-foot-high rope rigging, teaching them how to set the sails in a light breeze. For a while, the canvas billowed white and full until the wind died. *Bounty* circled the Ledge Lighthouse, a redbrick, two-story cube just off the mouth of the Thames, drifted in place for a while, and about midafternoon motored back to the City Pier.

Walbridge made a point to catch one of his guests—New London dockmaster Barbara Neff—before she went ashore. He told her that although *Bounty* had originally been scheduled to spend another night in the city, he had decided to leave that evening due to the oncoming hurricane. He explained that sailing around the hurricane could give *Bounty* a good boost of following winds after the storm passed.

Neff was mildly disappointed. When she got ashore, she and some others planned to set up a Halloween corn maze on the waterfront—she thought that *Bounty's* tall masts in the background would add a nice touch. However, having been acquainted with Walbridge for over fifteen years, she knew him to be low-key and intelligent, never cocky or pompous, and she felt his explanation for the change of plans both understandable and reassuring. She trusted his judgment.

As Walbridge talked with Neff, his crew accepted an invitation to visit the *Mississippi*. Walbridge joined them, but was among the first to return to *Bounty*, sometime before five o'clock.

Now Chief Mate Svendsen saw his chance. Asking Walbridge to join him on the dock and away from the rest of the crew, he told the skipper about the apprehension among the junior officers.

"There are people concerned about the hurricane," Svendsen told his boss. "I want to discuss options, including staying here."

Walbridge listened to his chief mate, as he always did, then offered his own thoughts. "A ship is safer at sea than in port," he told Svendsen, and said he would hold a meeting with the crew and explain his plan.

At about five o'clock everyone returned from the visit on the *Mississippi*. Often a recluse aboard *Bounty*, Walbridge nevertheless conducted an all-hands meeting every day, so this muster was far from unusual. Walbridge used these musters as teaching opportunities, for in part he saw his purpose aboard *Bounty* as an educator. He had come from a family of teachers as far back as his grandparents and some of his great-grandparents.

This muster would be different, though. Walbridge, celebrating his sixty-third birthday that afternoon—a low-key event he marked by splurging on a bottle of ginger ale—climbed atop a small deckhouse called the Nav Shack (below its roof were the ship's navigational equipment and chart table) and in his quiet way began talking.

In retrospect, this moment seemed preordained. Even as a boy, Walbridge thought through his options in silence, arriving at a decision well before those around him realized there were choices to be made. Similarly on this afternoon, he had decided, selected a path—his path—and he did not seek suggestions. Certainly there were alternative routes for *Bounty* in the days to come. Yet, like the chess player he'd been for fifty-five years, the captain considered all those moves and dismissed them.

"There is a hurricane headed this way," he told his fifteen shipmates with the falling sun at his back. "It's called Frankenstorm. There will be sixty-knot winds and rough seas. The boat's safer being out at sea than being buckled up at a dock somewhere." Then he laughed a little and, as if in jest, added, "You guys will probably be safer if you take a train inland." The levity ended there.

“I know that some of you have received phone calls and text messages from worried friends and family. If anyone wants to go ashore, now is the time. I won’t think any less of you. Come back to *Bounty* when the weather clears up.”

No one budged, nor did anyone speak.

“My plan is to sail south by east, to take some time and see what the storm is going to do.” He told them about hurricanes *Bounty* had encountered under his command. The ship had made it through then, and she would do so now.

Still, no one spoke. Chief Mate Svendsen, who had given his captain his best advice, did not now share his thoughts. He had accepted the Walbridge plan as prudent.

Nor did the second mate, third mate, or the bosun voice their doubts.

Some of the crew members were nervous as they looked up at Walbridge. Some were excited for a new adventure after a summer of tranquil voyages. The moment for objections passed, and everyone—even the new cook, who had first boarded *Bounty* the night before—went to work, preparing to set sail.

• • •

The sun slipped behind the railroad terminal just inshore from the City Pier. Dockmaster Neff and her crew were creating the Halloween maze when one of them looked up and saw *Bounty* was leaving. They all stood for a moment and enjoyed the spectacle: the dignified progress of a stately vessel of ancient proportions departing into the gathering dusk, heading south toward a monster storm.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE STORM

*Bounty has departed New London CT . . . Next Port of Call . . .  
St. Petersburg, Florida.  
Bounty will be sailing due East out to sea before heading  
South to avoid the brunt of Hurricane Sandy.*  
—Entry on HMS *Bounty* Facebook page, 6:06 p.m., October 25, 2012

Adam Prokosh had been aboard *Bounty* for almost eight months. On the evening of October 25, he watched as the ship passed the redbrick Ledge Lighthouse and entered Long Island Sound, following the dusk as it dissolved into darkness. Prokosh, twenty-seven, of Seattle, had spent several years on a number of tall ships and schooners before he arrived at *Bounty*'s dock in San Juan, Puerto Rico, as an able-bodied seaman, or AB, the lowest coast guard rating, but a step above an ordinary deckhand. He had been impressed with much of what he found aboard the old ship, which was at times referred to as a “movie prop.”

While there was truth to the description—*Bounty* had been built in 1960 in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, for use in the movie *Mutiny on the Bounty*, starring Marlon Brando, and had more recently played a role in two *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies—the ship's architect had created a rugged vessel that could actually sail. Whether sailing for MGM studios to Tahiti or doubling as the base of operations for the film crew and actors, *Bounty* was more than just a movie set. The ship was an expanded version of the HMS *Bounty*, with a 120-foot waterline as opposed to the original 86 feet that had been commanded by William Bligh. Inside were diesel-powered generators, air-conditioning, and other amenities necessary for moviemaking in the tropics.

Some of the film-crew equipment, such as cameras and lighting, had been scuttled by the time Prokosh boarded *Bounty*. But he had heard stories about the ship's adventures under Robin Walbridge and believed her to be fundamentally seaworthy. He was further impressed by how organized and informed the crew were. Prokosh felt that communications aboard *Bounty* were the best he had ever encountered aboard any vessel. He felt far more excitement than fear about sailing during Hurricane Sandy. Out on Long Island Sound, Prokosh felt his spirits soaring.

“Sailing is a sport and a team sport,” he would say. “This is the big game. End of the season. This is what we train for. I've been on boats before that don't emphasize seamanship. So those boats have a very set routine of Boston Harbor cruises. They will come back to the same dock after three hours. So, the little things about seamanship don't get emphasized.” *Bounty*, having sailed all over the world in every weather and with crew members whose experience ranged from nonexistent to

several licensed captains, had a special emphasis on seamanship training that he'd never experienced elsewhere.

The past season had been spent on tranquil seas. Prokosh could remember only two instances of sudden squalls that required the crew to douse sails on the double. There had been no sustained storms like what he had experienced on other boats. In his opinion, there was nothing quite like foul, exciting weather to drive home why you practiced good seamanship.

With these thoughts in mind Prokosh had gone into a New London bar earlier in the day. A patron who recognized him as a member of *Bounty's* crew approached him. Prokosh knew few details about the approaching hurricane, although the crew who had heard from worried family members had been chattering about it.

"You guys will be crazy leaving the dock," the bar patron told Prokosh.

"Are you kidding me?" he replied. "This is going to be great weather!"

• • •

At 11:00 a.m., Monday, October 22, commercial weather router Chris Parker predicted that the eighteenth tropical depression of the season would turn into Tropical Storm Sandy. In an email to his boating clients, Parker suggested that by Wednesday night Sandy could cross Cuba as a Category 1 hurricane. Yet Parker's email did not get to Robin Walbridge aboard *Bounty*. The tall ship was not one of Parker's subscribed customers. Parker's forecast a day later carried other sobering suggestions: "We're used to thinking of Hurricanes as geographically-small systems. Tornadoes cause 200+ mph winds along a swath less than 1 mile across. Most Hurricanes' strongest winds occur along a swath less than 30–40 miles across. The difference with Sandy is, as she transforms into a non-Tropical LO, her wind-field will expand geographically . . . AND she is expected to continue strengthening."

The predicted level of low pressure in Sandy "would normally support a [Category 4] Hurricane. In Sandy's case (as a non-Tropical LO), [that pressure] will probably support only 70–80 [-knot] winds . . . but those winds could blanket an area more than 500 miles across."

A large blanket, indeed, covering most of the Atlantic Ocean between the US East Coast and Bermuda.

"So, whatever your plans are in the next week-or-so, you MUST have a PLAN for what you'll do if Sandy brings 70–80k Hurricane Force winds (and maybe VERY LARGE surge of water) to your area."

At 4:42 p.m. on Thursday, about an hour before *Bounty* left City Pier, Parker emailed his clients with his latest insights: "Obviously, Sandy is the BIG STORY!" Landfall, he predicted, would be somewhere along the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia coast, possibly New Jersey sometime on Tuesday, October 30.

Parker had a number of clients who, like *Bounty*, were making southbound voyages at the time. Many of them were "snowbirds"—live-aboard sailors who headed for warmer harbors when autumn arrived—and they sought refuge. One of them had pulled into a marina in Atlantic City, where he was protected behind the tower of a casino.

Other weather experts had come to a similar conclusion about the storm. Weather router Herb Hilgenberg, who provides sailors with free weather reports from his home base in Burlington, Ontario, had among his regular listeners the crew of the Maine-based schooner *Harvey Gamage*. Captain Christopher Flansburg had sailed the schooner south to Fernandina Beach, Florida, on a voyage to the Dominican Republic and was two days into the next leg when he learned from Hilgenberg that

Sandy was forming. He turned the schooner around and docked in Jacksonville, Florida, for the next ten days.

By Thursday, October 25, when *Bounty* left City Pier in New London, Hilgenberg's reports had steered three sailboats to anchor in Bermuda, where they remained for the duration of the hurricane.

Like Hilgenberg, Parker had no clients at sea that Thursday.

• • •

The open ocean came into view around midnight. As *Bounty* approached the flashing white light on a tower at the end of Montauk Point, Long Island, the B-Watch came on duty—Second Mate Matt Sanders, deckhands John Jones and Jessica Hewitt, and able-bodied seaman Adam Prokosh. They found the seas calm and the skies clear. For an hour at a time, each watch stander steered *Bounty* by its big wooden steering wheel, called the helm, located aft of the rear mast (or mizzen) and used in Hollywood movies as far back as the 1935 film *Mutiny on the Bounty* starring Clark Gable. They also stood watch for an hour on the foredeck, where they were responsible for spotting traffic or obstacles, spent another hour doing boat checks in the engine room with bilge-pumping duties, and were on standby for an hour, in case their labor was needed.

In the six hours since leaving the dock, all of *Bounty*'s crew members had been on duty. Walbridge had told the new thirty-four-year-old cook, Jessica Black, to hold off on the evening meal. So she put the chili on simmer in the galley, which was located at the forward end of the middle, or tween, deck, and pitched in with the others. Everyone was “sea stowing,” securing everything on deck and belowdecks to prevent items from dislodging in the violent rocking of the ship during foul weather.

Tables on deck had to be tied down, and sails needed lashing. Prokosh organized the work on the top, or “weather,” deck knowing that if a piece of sail even as small as a handkerchief caught the wind in heavy weather, the entire sail would yank free and havoc would ensue. Walbridge had trained the crew to have the storm sails—smaller than sails used in moderate weather—ready in the case of rising winds. Prokosh oversaw that work, too.

When all was done and dark had settled over *Bounty*, the crew went down to the tween deck and then forward to the galley, where the steaming chili awaited them. Perhaps the hard work had primed their appetites, but all aboard felt Jessica's cooking had exceeded their expectations.

During the meal the A-Watch was on duty—their hours were always from eight until twelve, day or night. Chief Mate John Svendsen, the watch captain, did not have much tenure aboard *Bounty*. Walbridge had hired him in February 2010 as an able-bodied seaman. While he would say he had spent most of his life on the water, Svendsen's primary maritime employment before *Bounty* was as a dive instructor and dive-boat operator in Hawaii. He had sailed for a year aboard a modest tall ship, the *Californian*, a ninety-three-foot topsail schooner based in San Diego, and aboard another vessel operated by an environmental organization.

Svendsen was recognizable aboard *Bounty* by his shoulder-length, smoothly groomed, brown hair and his square build. At forty-one, the Minnesota native was articulate and measured. He was aware that aboard a tall ship there was much to learn, and he had once even searched for mentors in the maritime industry. But aboard *Bounty*, he was second-in-command. Only Robin Walbridge stood above him, and there was talk that when Walbridge retired in three years, Svendsen would replace him.

The able-bodied seaman on the A-Watch was an unpaid volunteer, Douglas Faunt, from Oakland, California. Though *Bounty* carried paid crew who received about \$100 a week and some officers who received a bit more than that, at sixty-six Faunt was retired and not only didn't need the money, but also enjoyed being able to sail at will and not on command.

Faunt had made a fortune selling a business and was now spending his money as he pleased. He rode motorcycles, traveled the world, and, being something of an electronics whiz, participated in ham-radio contests that took him to far-flung locales. But on *Bounty* Faunt found something—someone—who made the experience stand out above all other adventures: Robin Walbridge. Faunt loved him and saw Walbridge as a logical thinker, a consummate teacher, and someone that others should emulate.

Also on the A-Watch were deckhands Mark Warner, thirty-three, of Milton, Massachusetts, and Claudene Christian, forty-two, originally from Alaska and a former Miss Teenage Alaska. Of the two, Christian was known as the outgoing one with a “bubbly” personality.

Christian claimed to be a distant relative of Fletcher Christian, the master's mate aboard the original *Bounty* who, in Tahiti in April 1789, led a mutiny and seized control of the ship from Captain William Bligh. Christian didn't need to mention her notorious ancestor to attract attention, however. A petite blonde who had been a cheerleader at the University of Southern California, she once got the idea for a business—fashion dolls with cheerleader outfits from specific colleges and universities. In a sour ending to the Cheerleader Doll Co., Christian was sued by Mattel, maker of Barbie dolls. Before she reached *Bounty's* decks, she had returned to live with her parents in Oklahoma. She shared with her college friend Michelle Wilton that she didn't want to be there, was bored, and wanted a new start in life. Single and over forty, she felt that her life had hit a dead end. Then in May, with no significant tall ship experience, she joined *Bounty's* crew as a volunteer and loved life aboard. For the first time in a long, long time, she told Wilton, she felt at peace and happy.

Among the four A-Watch crew members, Faunt had the most tall ship experience, having for several years sailed off and on aboard *Bounty* and other square-rigged ships. By any measure, the watch was the oldest on board, with an average age of over forty-five years.

• • •

Prokosh was pleased to be sailing toward a hurricane with the four members of the A-Watch and the other eleven crew members who stayed aboard *Bounty* for her voyage to *Bounty's* 2012–2013 winter dock in Galveston, Texas. Yes, with only sixteen aboard, *Bounty* had her smallest crew since leaving San Juan in April. *But these sixteen, Prokosh thought, they are the right ones. They have stuck with Bounty the whole season, they know the boat well, and they really will give it their best.*

## CHAPTER THREE

# A VOYAGE WITH PURPOSE

*MY REVISED FORECAST: Landfall in S New Jersey, between Cape May and Atlantic City . . . during the night [Monday, October 29], and before Dawn [Tuesday, October 30] morning.*

*I caution either [of two computer models] could easily be correct.*

*Further, regardless where Sandy makes landfall, the entire region may see a long-duration (1–2 day) wind event, with nearly-uniform winds of 60–80 knots sustained (gusting 80–100k)—anywhere within 300 miles of Sandy’s landfall in all directions (600-mile-wide swath of destructive winds and potential Storm Surge).*

—Chris Parker, October 26, 2012, 6:36 a.m.

Chris Parker’s forecast did not reach *Bounty*’s Nav Shack. HMS *Bounty* Organization LLC had not chosen to buy Parker’s service, at a fee ranging up to \$195 a year.

At the time of Parker’s report, *Bounty* was sailing with both diesel engines hammering at full throttle, on a course of about 165 degrees from true north, about forty miles south of Montauk Point. She carried instruments for gathering weather information, including a single-sideband radio, on which she received faxed weather reports; a satellite telephone, from which she could call home base in Setauket, Long Island; a radar to view approaching weather; and Winlink 2000, a ham-radio-based email service.

That Walbridge and Hansen had not engaged a professional weather router to guide their ship’s voyage—not even the free service provided by Herb Hilgenberg—may have spoken more to Walbridge’s noble attitude and lifelong habit of self-reliance than to penury. But as with any wooden-tall-ship operator, Walbridge fought an ongoing battle for funds and was always selecting which of the ship’s many pressing needs would absorb the limited cash on hand. It was a difficult and lonely role. Richard Bailey, skipper of the tall ship *Rose* in the 1990s when Walbridge was his mate, recalls his own feeling of being not “just the hired captain, but the chief visionary of the project, always trying to increase revenue just so you have more money to spend. I think you become very alert to financial opportunities but also to financial losses or failures.” Needing to make the economics work creates pressures.

Walbridge had left *Rose* in 1995 to take the helm of *Bounty* and had been her skipper ever since. But he and Bailey had stayed in touch. Walbridge, a year older than his former boss, told Bailey about his fund-raising schemes and dreams, among them a plan to make frequent stops in Copenhagen, Denmark, where *Bounty* had drawn huge crowds. If you could do that often enough, you could make hundreds of

thousands of dollars a year. Bailey got the impression that *Bounty* was surviving on a rather low budget.

Some of Walbridge's big dreams worked out. Thanks to her role in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, in 2005 *Bounty* was able to dock in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, where the Steiner Shipyard was building boats for the same films. There, she got completely new rigging, replacing much of her ten miles of rope. The crew did the work but the materials and dock fees had been paid for by Disney, Walbridge told friends.

• • •

Not every deal is a blockbuster, though. Some income walked up *Bounty*'s gangplank one person at a time. The ship was licensed by the US Coast Guard as a "dockside attraction" only and was not permitted to engage in the more lucrative business of taking customers sailing. Although at times the HMS *Bounty* Organization LLC had made stabs at qualifying for a coast guard sail-training license—and at times advertised that it would take paying customers sailing—no such license had ever been earned.

So Walbridge's chore was to find ways to lure people off the dock in any city the ship visited, and a unique opportunity surfaced in January 2012 when *Bounty* was at its 2011–2012 winter dock in San Juan.

An Ohio photographer and event promoter, Gary Kannegiesser, wanted to become a private contractor who would take photographs of visitors in every port where *Bounty* docked. Since the primary source of *Bounty*'s income—other than the money spent on the ship by its owner, Robert Hansen—was the \$10 fee visitors paid to board the ship, Kannegiesser's scheme could be a nice addition. Once *Bounty* was inspected by the coast guard at a new dock, guests began walking the deck, climbing down to the tween deck, and imagining where, in Captain Bligh's day, various events would have occurred. If they had known *Bounty*'s recent history, they might silently have visualized Johnny Depp swaggering over the same deck boards now under their feet. They would be primed, Kannegiesser believed, for a photo op.

Kannegiesser suggested that he take pictures of visitors standing at *Bounty*'s impressive wooden helm and sell them copies. He wanted a two-year contract, hoping to cash in during the 2013 season when *Bounty* was scheduled to join other tall ships for a tour of the Great Lakes.

Robert Hansen had flown to San Juan and Kannegiesser met with him and Walbridge aboard *Bounty*. "Bob was a businessman and he thought it [the idea] was cool, but he left the decision-making up to Robin," Kannegiesser said. "Robin felt, 'I really don't know if I want to tie up the crew so they can have pictures taken.' He was lukewarm. Very cordial, but lukewarm at best."

During a break in the visit, Kannegiesser and a colleague who had made the trip with him went to a restaurant. At a nearby table sat an Alabama woman, Connie DeRamus, and her friend. The women were in Puerto Rico on vacation, and they eavesdropped and heard the men talking about *Bounty*. DeRamus's friend began asking questions about *Bounty*, and soon all four were conversing.

DeRamus had one topic she liked to discuss: her twenty-nine-year-old daughter, Ashley, a blond young woman with Down syndrome. For years, DeRamus had thought of building a clothing line around Ashley, garments that would take into account the unique figure of Down syndrome girls and women, whom department-store clothing seldom fit. She told the men about her dreams.

"That's a great idea," Kannegiesser said. "Why don't you do it?"

They continued to talk, and Kannegiesser began envisioning a role for Ashley DeRamus that would connect her with *Bounty*. He had in mind a concession on the dock beside *Bounty* where silicone bracelets promoting Ashley by Design—the name DeRamus had chosen for her daughter’s clothing line—could be sold. He imagined a charitable, nonprofit organization under whose auspices the bracelets would be marketed and which would raise funds for the needs of Down syndrome children and adults.

Eventually, Robin Walbridge agreed to Kannegiesser’s photography scheme, and Kannegiesser decided to begin slowly. When the season started in April and *Bounty* sailed north from Puerto Rico, the photographer and a crew of five boarded a recreational vehicle, joining *Bounty* at its first stops in St. Augustine and Jacksonville, Florida.

DeRamus’s friend Kim lived in Jacksonville. Her home on the St. Johns River had a pool. Kannegiesser and his crew stopped there for a break from travel and discussed how to make the photo operation at the next port—Savannah—more functional.

“Then Kim and I decided to go to Savannah and help out,” DeRamus said. “I just brought Ashley’s bracelets along because I could, and I set up a picture of her and [an] Ashley by Design [sign]. We just had that sitting on the corner of the photo table. It ended up that a remarkable number of parents stopped by to see what it was all about.”

DeRamus recognized then that having her daughter present would help boost donations to the nonprofit.

“The idea evolved [from] actually talking to the captain about Ashley,” she said.

DeRamus and her friend stayed with Kannegiesser through the next two ports, Charleston, South Carolina, and Wilmington, North Carolina. DeRamus was busy the next few weeks, and not until the end of May did she and Ashley return to *Bounty*, in Greenport, New York, *Bounty*’s registered home port. By then, Kannegiesser had an agreement from Walbridge that Ashley could set up a small area near the photo booth to sell bracelets and tell her story.

At first, DeRamus says, she didn’t know which of the crew members was *Bounty*’s skipper. “Robin was so humble and unassuming that he never announced to anyone that he was the captain,” she said. “He was always wearing a *Bounty* T-shirt or sweatshirt, cruising the deck, talking with visitors.”

From Greenport on, the recreational vehicle, with Kannegiesser, DeRamus, Ashley, and the five photo employees, arrived at every port where *Bounty* stopped. There was a swing north up the Hudson River and then a voyage south to the Chesapeake Bay and Annapolis, Maryland. Next was a stop in Philadelphia, in the midst of a hundred-degree heat wave that kept visitors away in droves, and then *Bounty* returned to Long Island, where it docked at Port Jefferson, below the bluffs of Setauket, home to the ship’s corporate offices as well as her owner, Robert Hansen.

The ship, her crew, and the photo team visited Plymouth, Boston, Gloucester, and Newburyport, Massachusetts, and sailed to Star Island in the Isles of Shoals, six miles offshore from Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Two weeks later, they were in Nova Scotia, where they visited Lunenburg, *Bounty*’s birthplace.

Along the way, DeRamus saw Walbridge developing what she later described as “a kind of rapport” with her daughter. To DeRamus, Walbridge seemed sweet and compassionate.

DeRamus also said she and her daughter developed a friendship with everybody in the crew. “They were just really genuinely nice people, but they were sailors and

they weren't into giving tours of the ship and stuff, except for Claudene," DeRamus said.

When Kannegiesser's summer help went home near the end of the season, Claudene Christian was recruited to become part of the photo crew. In port, she donned the Tahitian-print dress provided by DeRamus and helped with Kannegiesser's and DeRamus's operations.

In Plymouth, Massachusetts, Walbridge welcomed Ashley and Connie DeRamus on board as crew members. They sailed to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and then, watched over by other crew members, Ashley sailed on *Bounty* without her mother for the better part of a week, handling some of the duties of sailing a tall ship, perhaps a first for a person with Down syndrome.

In every port, Ashley was at the dock with her colorful bracelets, taking donations. "We got anywhere from one dollar to twenty dollars for donations, depending on the persons," her mother said. "We had a table set up where we had printers for the photo operation. The people who had the pictures taken at the helm would come back to our table. We had an extra little extension table at the end of our photo booth. She [Ashley] had a sign explaining what she was doing."

Meanwhile, Kannegiesser's brain was churning out ideas connecting *Bounty* and Ashley. He and Walbridge talked of bringing Down syndrome children aboard for voyages the following summer, 2013, on the Tall Ships America fleet tour of the Great Lakes.

"They [*Bounty*] would either bring a parent [to supervise their child] or one of the crew members would supervise," DeRamus said. "We were all very excited about that, giving Downs kids an opportunity for independence and learning about sailing, the education, self-esteem, responsibility, and the self-discipline. We spent a lot of time, and Gary and Robin especially, discussing the logistics of this next summer and what we were going to do," DeRamus said. Walbridge wanted to make Ashley the liaison for special needs on *Bounty*, DeRamus said.

While she helped Kannegiesser with his photo operation, DeRamus was not his employee. "He took me and Ashley and gave her the opportunity to raise money. We used his photo opportunity to promote [Ashley's] foundation."

When, in September, *Bounty* was hauled out at the Boothbay Harbor (Maine) Shipyard for maintenance and repairs, Ashley and her mother returned to Birmingham, Alabama, where Ashley was a volunteer at the Bell Center, which helps special-needs children. She and her mother made a \$6,300 donation to the center from the money they collected at *Bounty*'s side.

But the connection among *Bounty*, Walbridge, and Down syndrome did not end there. Kannegiesser had located the Down Syndrome Network of Tampa Bay. "Gary had approached me [in September]," said Shirley Lawyer, head of the nonprofit group. "I guess he was kind of calling around, trying to find some connection to Down syndrome in the Tampa area."

Lawyer was familiar with *Bounty*, which had spent many winters as a dockside attraction in neighboring St. Petersburg.

In 2012, Walbridge wanted *Bounty* to visit St. Petersburg one more time. He and his wife, Claudia McCann, had a home there. But there was another reason: the St. Petersburg Pier, where, for many years, *Bounty* was a seasonal fixture moored on the pier's south side during the winter, was scheduled for demolition.

"When she [*Bounty*] came to St. Petersburg," Lawyer said, "we would bring as many people as we could get down to the [dock]. We have 450 families on our mailing list." Kannegiesser, the promoter, envisioned Ashley DeRamus leading the crowd in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. "That was one component of the event,"

Lawyer says. “And then it was asked if we would have three or four families who would be interested in sailing on the ship. We were going to sail across the Gulf of Mexico to Texas,” where *Bounty* was scheduled to spend the winter in Galveston.

• • •

Ashley DeRamus was not the first special-needs person Captain Robin Walbridge had ever met. Nor was Gary Kannegiesser the first person to suggest that Walbridge pay attention to and have concern for the handicapped. Walbridge’s father, Howard, had worked as a vocational and rehabilitation counselor for the State of Vermont. In that work, he saw the needs of the blind and developed the Vermont State Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Often when his children were growing up, Howard would bring them to events for those with special needs.

“Dad was a very compassionate person,” said Lucille Walbridge Jansen, Robin’s older sister. “In the course of working with challenged people, Dad saw a need for them to socialize and be with others and [to] realize they were not alone. He developed the Indoor Sports Club, which met once a month. There was food involved, refreshments,” and the Walbridge children were invited. Mingling with those whom some might view as “different,” Lucille Walbridge “felt like a queen when Dad allowed me to come with him.” Her little brother, four years younger, enjoyed similar experiences.

Thus Robin Walbridge had several reasons to agree when Kannegiesser proposed the Down syndrome event in St. Petersburg. Publicity for Walbridge’s beleaguered ship was but one. He let his crew know about the Florida event and Ashley’s involvement. Reflecting on the decision to sail from New London, Connecticut, in the face of an advancing hurricane, crew member Doug Faunt later remarked that had *Bounty* not sailed when it did, “We would have disappointed all the people in St. Pete. The captain wanted to push to make that destination.”