



# SKIP NOVAK

INSTANT COMMUNICATIONS MEAN PLANS ARE CONSTANTLY BEING CHANGED AND MODIFIED. SKIP HANKERS AFTER THE LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS OF PAST DECADES

**R**ecently my old shipmate Phil Wade and I were reminiscing about his stamp collection. Phil is the most unlikely collector, but his many books of stamps depicting all things that float are an impressive record of a lifetime of travel. I call Phil a 'collector of stamps, a collector of dreams.'

Not for the first time, we hashed over the evolution of communication over our lifetimes. Sending postcards to friends and, more poignantly, receiving them at poste restante (for those under the age of 30, Google it!), was such a joy.

Since social media and the way people now communicate, often while 'bowling alone,' is ever more in the news, I have to retell a favourite story (for probably the 100th time). This is a story from the 1970s, and I will gladly bore anyone who will listen about how everything that happened back then was all good. It demonstrates what was possible when making a long-term arrangement.

In the spring of 1979 I delivered an IOR maxi from Honolulu to Manila, and on arrival became stranded when

the owner disappeared and the boat was eventually impounded.

I was living the adventure, going to cock fighting matches – an

inexpensive distraction that kept me amused – but running out of cash. I started putting out feelers by telex at the main post office downtown. I needed a ticket out.

This was pre-fax machine. The first fax I saw was at Hood sailmakers in Lymington detailing a tack patch and it was sent to our Portacabin office in Hamble during the Whitbread Race work-up on *Drum* in 1985. We gathered around and stared at this magic piece of paper... Telexes and telegrams were the mode of comms up til then.

If, in the field, they required some legwork it was a case of marching around to post offices and standing in queues. Then you returned daily to wait for an answer that might never come. One positive thing about this was it gave you a lot of time to contemplate your future – or lack of one.

In May, after two months in Manila, a welcome telegram arrived from the UK. 'Need you as skipper. Parmelia Race to Freemantle. Start in August. Peter Wright.' I agreed by return. I was saved.

If you ignored the heat and humidity, the armies of mosquitos at night and the filth in the harbour, things weren't all bad in Manila. There was an incredible collection of yachties in what seemed to be permanent residence. Solo sailors, families, ne'er do wells and chancers aplenty. Many had bought cheap production boats in Asia and a year later, on the way to somewhere, got no further. They were always 'waiting for a part' in order to ship out and carry on.

While working out the details of my departure a lone Frenchman and I struck a chord in Franglais and we got on the subject of alpine mountains – as you do in the heat of the pre-monsoon with sweat running down your backside.

He was on his way to Freemantle delivering a Choey Lee, one of those Hong Kong specials down by their waterlines with teak trim.

Planning ahead now and seeing as I would be in Australia by December for the Sydney Hobart Race, I sent a telex to a mate, Graham 'Frizzle' Freeman, who was skipper of a new Frers maxi, *Bumble Bee 4*, asking for a berth. I was all set for the next nine months, and back in the day that was pretty good going.

The monsoon broke just as Patrick shoved off for points south and I was about to board a flight. It was like flushing a toilet, the toilet being the open sewers of Manila, the septic tank the harbour.

Patrick and I had agreed to meet at the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia in Sydney on Christmas day on the eve of the Hobart Race. I was there on the day and so was he. For six months since Manila there had been no communication to the contrary. Indeed, no communication at all. When I finished the race we jetted over to New Zealand and spent the entire summer mountaineering.

How different it is today when all our plans (read lack of) seem to be continually modified and adjusted, right up to the moment when you trip over the kerb while your friend almost walks off the dock, both of you on smartphones within line of sight of each other.

Ahhh, the Seventies...

## 'I WAS LIVING THE ADVENTURE, BUT RUNNING OUT OF CASH'