



Christi and Eric celebrate a happy ending in San Diego to their round-the-world adventure. Christi pays a visit to the Monkey Forest Sanctuary in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, upper left. Yalobi Bay, off Waya Island in Fiji, provides a picturesque anchorage for *Kosmos*. The Miraflores lock on the Panama Canal accommodates ships big and small.





# Someday is **TODAY**

Thirty-somethings Eric and Christi Grab decided their dream of circumnavigating simply couldn't wait for middle age or beyond

**BY ZUZANA PROCHAZKA**  
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**H**alfway between Dana Point and San Diego the VHF crackled, “Nordhavn off my port bow, come in, please.” Eric and Christi Grab were on their Nordhavn 43, *Kosmos*, for a run down the coast just three weeks after completing their circumnavigation. A man on a passing sportfisher had recognized the make of the vessel and the boat itself, and said he had been following their travels on the couple's blog.

Perhaps this fan, and maybe others in the Grabs' legion of readers, were drawn as much by their feat as by the unconventional way they went about it. Atypically, instead of either taking off right after college or waiting until retirement, they interrupted already successful careers to pursue a dream that would not wait until “someday.”

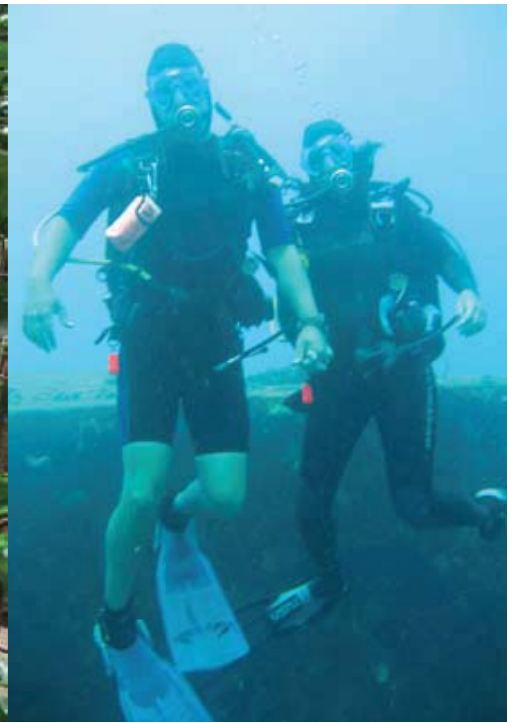
Their youth, in itself, is a marked contrast to many in the adventure-cruising community who are middle aged and beyond, taking to the water to enjoy the fruits of their labors, children happily out on their own. Unconventional as well is the Grabs' relative inexperience. While not exactly nautical neophytes, they certainly did not have the ocean-

going experience of most—although not all, by any means—of others who have circumnavigated. Yet whatever they lacked in experience, they made up through hard work, preparation, education and determination.

Amazing—and perhaps unconventional as well—is the speed with which they made their dream a reality. From the first seed of the idea of circumnavigating to returning to their San Diego slip, a little less than six years elapsed, including their two-year trip aboard *Kosmos*, the Greek word for “the world.”

Their parents were healthy, there were no kids yet, and they knew they could return to their careers—Eric was director of engineering at a video software firm and Christi owned a mortgage brokerage business. Even though they could pull off the finances, it would be no easy chore breaking away for a year from firmly entrenched real world commitments. Once they decided on traveling by boat, Eric's research showed that due to weather patterns and speed of travel, one year wasn't going to be enough. The plan stretched to two.

Christi inherited the travel bug from her dad, who



Time for a canopy walk in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, French West Indies, upper left. Testing the waters in Bonaire. Eric plays tourist at the Temple of Djoser-djeseru, in Luxor, Egypt. Christi takes a siesta at Anaho Bay, Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas Islands of French Polynesia.

joined them on three separate occasions during their circumnavigation. Having cared for her ill mother, who died at 59 without realizing her dreams, Christi learned the value of living in the present and not putting plans off.

Eric's family, on the other hand, was perplexed and concerned. They had good jobs and could buy a big house in the suburbs. What was wrong with them?

The misgivings disappeared, however. First, the couple created a blog to keep everyone updated on their trip. Eric's parents actually became more engaged in his life than they had been with him living nearby. As well, they used a time-release feature on their blog software, so that if they were reporting a particularly scary event in real time, it would only be posted after the fact. This way they could tell the truth without worrying anyone unnecessarily. And second, when his mother took ill and Eric flew back to be with her, something unexpected happened. Though some in the family insisted that Eric and Christi return home and end their trip where the boat was at the time, in Port Ghalib, Egypt, his parents became avid supporters and insisted they finish, no matter what.

One look at their comprehensive blog and it's clear these two are organized down to the last detail. Entries include the boat, activities, food, plans, FAQs, resources and passages. There is a highlights section, annual summaries and even a chronological listing by month.

Their methodical natures certainly helped as they formed and executed their plan. Eric had a 28-foot Bayliner and considered moving up to a 36-foot Carver, so he and Christi attended a boat show to check one out. While there, Christi noticed a sign on a Nordhavn 40, which read I Can Cross the

Atlantic. "You mean the rest of these boats can't?" she asked. Eric initially dismissed the boat as being overbuilt for what they needed, bigger than what they had been looking at. But as their plans evolved, so did his thinking.

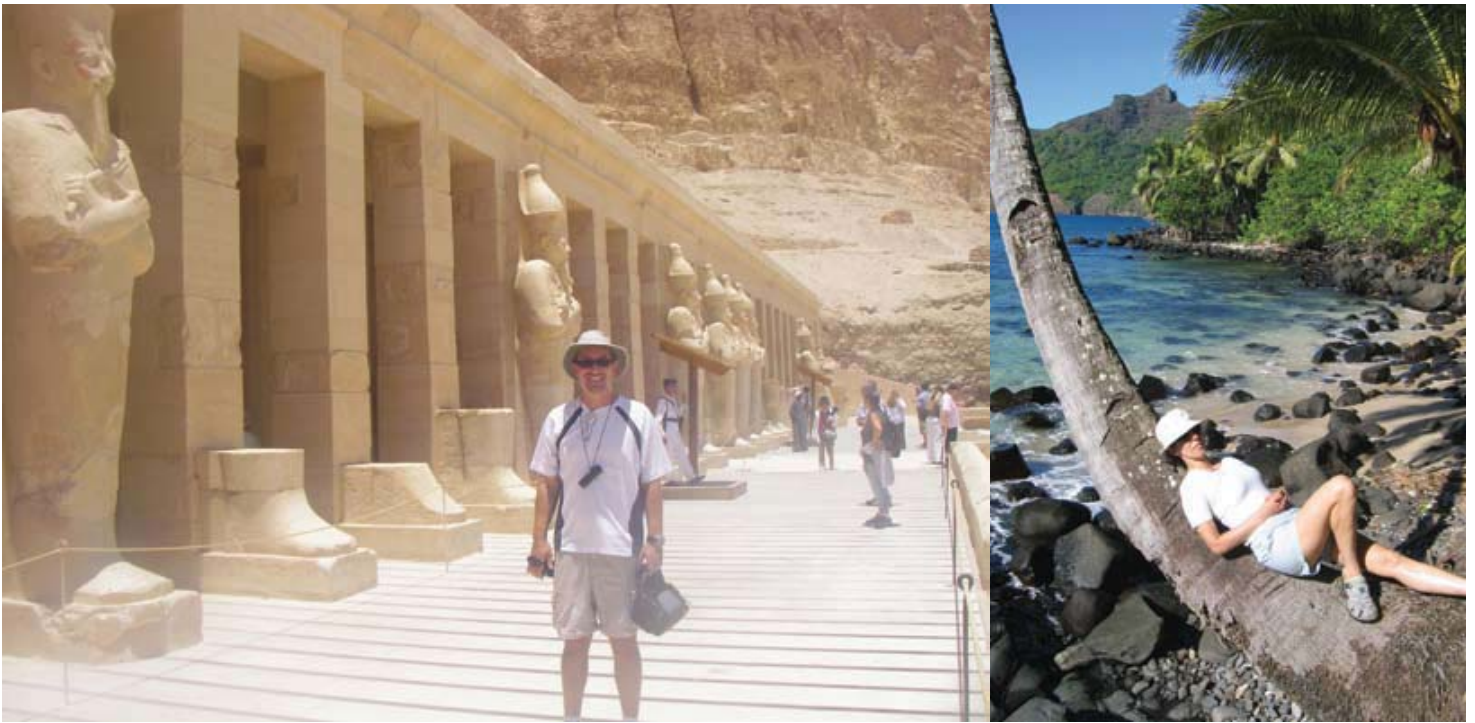
So, in 2003, after getting engaged, the couple walked into Nordhavn's offices and announced that they would like to go around the world in a boat. Tough to imagine, somebody took these two seriously. Jeff Merrill, a West Coast Nordhavn sales representative, guided them through every step of preparation and touched base regularly, usually once a month by email, for the two years they were out.

For nearly four years they worked long hours, cut their expenses and researched, planned and prepared. Together they took navigation, safety and first aid classes. They spent time with professional captains and diesel mechanics, and they even flew to Fort Lauderdale to volunteer at the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally where meeting Nordhavn staff and other owners only cemented their decision. As their support network grew, so did their confidence and determination.

#### Perfect in every way

The Grabs were sold on Nordhavn because they trusted the Nordhavn brand and reputation for rugged voyaging capabilities, even given their limited experience. They chose a new boat, believing it would present fewer maintenance or mechanical problems. And then there was the matter of financing—money would become available right at the time their new boat would be ready.

Their Nordhavn 43 proved the perfect fit: it had the amenities they required, it could fit easily into most marinas in the world, and it was a manageable boat,



not too small and not too big. It was just right.

A last-minute glitch with the sale of Eric's Bayliner threatened to scuttle their plans, however, the boat sold. The next day their rental property sold, and the following Monday their loan for *Kosmos* came through. Kismet? Maybe, but thorough preparation can be every bit as important. "The ties that bind you to your current life, be they family, finances, work or anything else, are sticky," says Christi. "And you have to pry them off you to take the big step toward something new."

Departure day for Eric, 37, and Christi, 33, arrived April 28, 2007. Their first leg was also their longest, covering nearly 2,835 nautical miles in 21 days between San Diego and the Marquesas. Although they had logged 1,800 miles, it had been confined to the 200 miles of coastline between Ensenada, Mexico and the Channel Islands off the California coast. This was a big first step.

Having worked until the day before departure, Christi found herself struggling for two of those first three weeks, unable to adjust from the hectic pace ashore. And it was rough. So rough that she pleaded with Eric that they stay in a hotel at their first port just to get away from the rocking and rolling. Fortunately, they had experienced crew aboard in the form of another Nordhavn owner, and upon arrival found that the landfall was worth the rough crossing.

The waters of the Pacific continued to be challenging and the Grabs began to have serious doubts about continuing. However, they had set a goal of reaching Australia at which point they would decide whether to sell the boat or keep going.

"That's where I learned that seas are different everywhere," says Eric. "After Australia, with the exceptions of the Red Sea and some bad weather,

#### KOSMOS SNAPSHOT

## Scary in Scari

### The crew of *Kosmos* learns to keep ports closed

There were tense moments in the Aeolian Islands off the Italian mainland. In fact, it got downright scary in the port of Scari, on the island of Stromboli. Arriving back at the beach at night after a hike, Eric and Christi found a storm had moved in and the mooring they were tied to was dragging *Kosmos* toward the rocky shore. Six-foot (2-meter) swells made it impossible to launch their dinghy and no locals wanted any part of getting them out to the boat.

A nearby sailboat, meanwhile, had broken loose from its mooring and drifted out to sea. Its captain, Louis, offered to swim to *Kosmos* and help them if they helped him. He climbed up the mooring line to the bow and then helped Eric onto the swim platform. Together they discovered that the boat was flooding. The two automatic bilge pumps were running but the water was not receding. They soon found two ports that were left open with water pouring in. But once those were closed, the water was still at the same level, and the manual pump was also not working.

However, since the water level was not rising, they started the engine, headed into the darkness, and with the help of radar they found Louis' unlit boat a few miles out. Louis boarded his boat and headed to an anchorage while Eric decided to try for the closest island with haul-out facilities. A while later, Eric was hailed again by Louis who was in trouble once more, so Eric took the sailboat under tow to the port of Lipari. There, a diver surveyed *Kosmos*' bottom and reported no damage to the hull, but Eric did discover the pumps had been clogged by a soggy box which had fallen into the bilge. Although the pumps were running, they were not actually removing the water that had flooded in through the ports.

It was a happy ending. *Kosmos* was fine, a sailboat had been saved twice, and Christi—along with their dinghy and engine—was making her way from Scari to Lipari aboard a passenger ferry.

—ZP



Sunsets are both breathtaking and commonplace at Ko Muk, Thailand. *Kosmos* heads into San Diego, ending a two-year voyage in which she visited 30 countries and covered nearly 30,000 miles.

the seas were completely different from the Pacific and we were able to keep going.” Christi says the South Pacific has the worst seas but the best landfalls, which made it all worthwhile.

Everything was a learning experience, and no more so than Down Under where the couple got a taste of Australia’s tough quarantine laws as they apply to meat. They had stocked up on some excellent beef in Vanuatu, but after learning it would be confiscated in Australia, Christi cooked it all up and froze it in individual containers.

Sorry, said the authorities, it still would have to be confiscated. To keep the Tupperware, could Christi at least microwave the portions so they could be loosened and put into a bag? That was OK. While she was doing that, another branch of officialdom came aboard, this time with a dog trained to sniff out guns and drugs. The canine, ever professional, went about her duties with focus, and once finished she received a “good girl” and a pat on the head. No longer able to contain herself, however, the animal lunged at the bag with the meat. She was unrelenting and it took several of her handlers to separate her from her prize and get her off the boat. G’day mate.

Eric is a computer engineer and his technical savvy helped him during their preparation as he devoured information on boat systems and equipment. They put over 5,000 hours on the main engine, 2,000 hours on the genset and about 40 hours on the wing engine. “The systems were great and the preventive maintenance was basic,” says Eric. “If the manual said change the oil after X hours, I changed the oil after X hours.”

The Grabs took on crew for passages longer than 10 days. Otherwise they stood four-hour watches and planned crossings using Visual Passage Planner 2, a navigation software program. Eric voted the satellite phone and AIS system as his critical pieces of equipment; Christi leaned toward their redundant GPS systems and the washer/dryer. “We didn’t spend much time on life chores when we made landfall,” she says. “We had a watermaker, a washer/dryer, a freezer full of food and large fuel tanks. When we arrived somewhere, we went ashore and enjoyed it.”

The Grabs covered nearly 30,000 miles, visiting 30 countries in two years and two days. It was a tight schedule and although they wished they could have lingered in some favorite locales like Malta and Bonaire, they felt they set the right pace given their interests and timetable. They calculated that they spent 28 percent of the time at sea and the rest exploring their destinations, and that was just about right. “We would have liked to stay a while in some places and make friends,” says Christi, “but when cruisers came by, we were never home because we were off doing activities ashore.”

When they were aboard, Christi and Eric spent time in the master stateroom, which is equipped with a drop-down screen and a rear projector, and they watched hundreds of movies. “We used the boat as shelter and a vehicle,” says Eric.

#### Future cruising plans loose

As of this writing, Eric and Christi’s plans were loose. He returned to work with his former company within weeks of their return to San Diego; she is working on the blog and formatting it into a book. Will there be another trip? Maybe, but it won’t be on this boat. As of mid-June they had *Kosmos* listed for sale.

For Eric and Christi this fantastic voyage wasn’t so much about lessons learned; it was more about bolstering beliefs they already held. Among them: one shouldn’t live in fear of the unknown, but preparation goes a long way toward avoiding recklessness. As well, people are basically good and willing to help, that living outside your comfort zone is not bad, and that conventional wisdom is just that—conventional.

The Grabs don’t see themselves as special because they circumnavigated 20 to 30 years sooner than most or because they did it under power. Eric liked boats. Christi wanted to see the world. They found a way to mesh the two without necessarily seeing the boating lifestyle as the end game. That might be blasphemy in the cruising community where, traditionally, all revolves around the boat.

But, then, if they had thought more traditionally, they might be in the same slip as today, with the same view and the same dream of “someday.” **IV**

## ROUND AND ABOUT

**Started:** April 28, 2007

**Ended:** May 1, 2009

**Countries/territories:** 30

**Nautical miles:** 28,930

**Countries/territories visited:** French Polynesia (Nuku Hiva, Fatu Hiva, Manihi, Apataki, Fakarava, Tahiti, Moorea, Tahaa, Bora Bora), Cook Islands (Suvarrow), Niue, Tonga (Vava'u), Fiji (Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Waya), Vanuatu (Efate, Espiritu Santo), Australia (Cairns, Port Douglas, Lizard Island, Thursday Island), Indonesia (Kupang, Rinca, Lubuan Bajo, Bali, Karimata), Singapore (Sentosa), Malaysia (Port Dickson, Langkawi), Thailand (Ko Muk, Phi Phi Li, Phi Phi Don, Phuket), India (Port Blair, Havelock), Maldives (Male), Oman (Salalah), Egypt (Port Ghalib, Suez City), Greece (Crete, Kos, Pylos), Turkey (Bodrum), Italy (Siracusa, Trapani, Stromboli, Lipari, Rome), Monaco, France (St. Tropez, Le Lavandou, Porquerolles), Spain (Palma, Las Palmas), Gibraltar, Guadeloupe, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Bonaire, Panama (San Blas, Colon, Panama City), Costa Rica (Golfito), Nicaragua (San Juan Del Sur), Mexico (Huatulco, Ixtapa, Barra de Navidad, Cabo San Lucas, Ensenada).

