

## My journey on *Theo's Future*, Brixham to Falmouth, 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> July 2008



Good heavens!!!! Three days of my life have suddenly rushed passed me in such a whirl of intense activity: Brixham to Dartmouth on Saturday; Dartmouth to Salcombe on Sunday, Salcombe to Falmouth via a photo call with the *Plymouth Herald* on Sunday. Now that I am back in the safety of my land locked home, it almost seems as if it never happened – if it wasn't for the bruises and weathered look that I now have.

I had no experience of sailing – *none at all* - but when I first heard about what Mike was doing and realised that there were a few slots free on the crew list, I thought it would be a bit of fun and a new experience – a way to top up the tan and have a peaceful few days floating around the south coast ... I didn't understand why people kept telling me I was brave! How misguided could I have been .... well to start with, I hadn't really considered the *size* of the boat, how three of us (including two men I hadn't met before) were living and sleeping within very close proximity, and the fact that I wouldn't have my own en-suite bathroom .... Bathroom!!!!? What was I thinking of? After I had committed myself to the trip, Mike told me "to put my mind at ease" that I didn't need to worry because they had a portapotti with a curtain around it. Far from putting my mind at ease, I quickly developed a phobia towards the contraption. However, a couple of days before I left to join them, I watched a programme where Ranulph Fiennes described how he tackled his problem of vertigo by climbing the Eiger – so I would tackle this

portapotti!!!!!! (However, Sir Ran did end the programme by saying that at the end of his expedition his vertigo was worse than ever!!)

The arrival in Brixham was the end of a week of very hard sailing for Mike with atrocious weather, and the boat was given a dedicated theme tune (in the likeness of the Beatles melody ....) *We all live in a gree-eeen submarine* – an indication of some of the sea conditions she had brought them through. The consequence of the regular drenching was that the cabin and contents had got somewhat damp. On the morning of my first day the boat was having a bit of a spring clean and all the contents were spread out on the pontoon bringing a number of questioning comments as to whether it would all go back in . But in amongst all our possessions on display was the aforementioned accoutrement. Mike was SO excited ... that I, Jilly Rumble, would be the first to use his wonderful brand new portapotti – (No pressure there then! What if I couldn't perform!?) However, as we took a closer look, it turned out that a vital piece of it was missing, rendering it unusable!!!! I was rapidly turning from Princess Portapotti into Hyacinth Buckét.



But the whole trip was wonderful. I was with two of the loveliest men in the world (after my husband of course), Mike and Patrick Clarke. They taught me the rudiments of sailing, and they even said I was quite good!

I had some lifetime first magical moments such as when we had motored out of Brixham harbour, I was at the helm and the sails were full, we were racing along and we turned off the engine; suddenly there was no other

sound but the sea - the feeling of peace was like a quick acting drug and I have become an addict!

Sailing into Dartmouth, one of the prettiest ports in the country, was special and the next morning from my little hamster nest amongst the bags on the forward bunk, I could look up to the sky through the forward hatch without taking my head off the pillow. There was not a ripple on the water or a cloud in the sky. At this time of day the forward hatch was often the only exit for me before we cleared the cabin a bit more. Neighbouring sailors were often surprised to see me stick my head up like a rabbit emerging from his burrow – if they had already seen Mike and Patrick come out on deck, they didn't imagine there could possibly be enough room for another crew member!!! The usual comment was "It must be cosy in there!!"

Other special times included every time I found a loo on dry land.

In each port our beautiful little boat with its "Fight for Sight" flag and numerous sponsor stickers created great interest. Other sailors and passers-by asked about our trip and the reason behind it. Many generous people gave us donations in support.

On my last day our schedule had changed slightly, and Plymouth became a quick stop (our navigator, Patrick, had wanted to by-pass the fair city in order to keep to the timetable, but Mike was keen to set up a press call and see his god daughter – the decision as to whether or not we should stop in Plymouth was swayed heavily by my comment that it would be nice to break the 11 hour journey and use the loos there! (I had on the previous two days maintained my dignity through carefully controlled liquid intake, strong pelvic muscles and sheer will power.)

We checked in with the Plymouth Herald and they were interested in our story and would send someone ... at first nobody arrived, but after many and various telephone calls the photographer eventually turned up 90 minutes after we should have left, with the result that we missed the most favourable tides making the remainder of the journey a much greater challenge. We did eventually reach Falmouth at 2100 hours (having left Salcombe at 0430 hours) - it was a very long day. A big thank you goes to Stephanie, Patrick's wife, whose hospitality included a wonderful warming, welcoming supper and a fantastic bath opportunity in their lovely home.



From a personal point of view, my trip was hard work but fantastic fun. I am covered in bruises and very tired. My respect for Mike and what he is doing to raise money for Professor Tony Moore's important piece of research equipment and to support Theo and other children with Leber's Congenital Amaurosis (or LCA for short) has increased a hundredfold. If anyone who reads this who hasn't been sailing thinks it is just a merry jaunt – believe me that is not the situation at all. Before I went I just didn't know what Mike was taking on and the difficult conditions he was enduring, never mind giving up 12 weeks of his life for a good cause. It is pure hard work all the time - when we were not sailing, there was always some work to be done for the boat or some campaigning and fundraising to be done, and Mike gives every bit of every day to the task. My respect also goes to my fellow crew member who is also a hero. Patrick knew what he was taking on with this trip, he did all the sailing bits that I couldn't, and worked hard to keep us on the right track and get us to port on time despite the various delays ...

No, I'm not a heroine at all – it was total ignorance that got me on the boat, but I did the best I could each day, and I have raised nearly £750 in sponsorship from friends and family, I hope to raise a bit more ... and I have topped up my tan!

