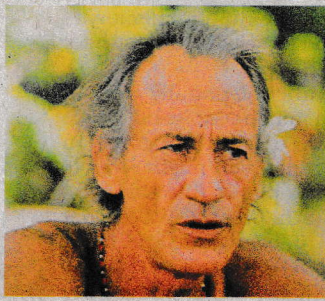


remembering a legend:

April 10, 2018 would have been Bernard Moitessier's 93rd birthday. To commemorate the occasion, we republished a *Latitude 38* interview from 1981 with the French sailing legend. Moitessier discussed fighting with 'The Dragon' during his epic solo circumnavigation in the Golden Globe Race in 1968 — a race that he famously dropped out of to 'save his soul'. The

BERNARD MOITESSIER



Dragon was a concept that at once seemed to dominate Bernard's thoughts, but was something he had difficulty explaining. "We all have to fight against something," he told *Latitude's* Frank DiMarco. "And if we don't fight, we never evolve. We just stay what we are, which means we stay a bunch of monkeys. We have to fight against something that is bigger than us." We asked our readers what the life, writing, philosophy and sailing

proWess of Bernard Moitessier meant to them.

"I don't necessarily believe in sainthood, but Moitessier was the only person I have known who made me feel that I was in the presence of someone trying, through the power of will, to live like a saint," wrote Kimball Livingston.

"When I first met Moitessier in 1976, I had sailed to the Island of Ahe in the Tuamotus, after I'd sailed *Starflower* [a Cheoy Lee Offshore 27] from Alameda to the Marquesas," wrote Leo Gulley, who has sailed over 100,000 nm, and now resides in Sydney. "When I first saw him, Bernard was paddling ashore in an innertube with a net inside to stand in for his dinghy! We got along very well. He was trying to make a living on a small motu on the atoll of Ahe in the Tuamotus. Previously, I had been in Tahiti when I met Moitessier's wife — she told me that she was trying to get some supplies and cats (yes, *meow* type cats) to Bernard, who was showing the locals how to keep the rats under control. Moitessier and I became good friends. He was fascinating. His zest for life, adventure, sailing knowledge, and fight with 'The Dragon' was an inspiration.

"We crossed paths in the South Pacific a couple times. In 1981 (fish) Moitessier sailed *Joshua* into Sausalito along with his wife and son; he had commitments for his film and lectures. We spent some very good times together. After he left the Bay, he parted ways with his wife, sailed south, and eventually gave *Joshua* away after she had been blown ashore in a hurricane in Cabo San Lucas.

"He wanted a new boat and came back to San Francisco when he got an offer for the design of a 30-ft (fish) boat he had in Richmond. We again spent lots of time together. He would sometimes stay at my house in Alameda, but really preferred his time on the new boat he was building, *Tamata*. One especially memorable time was when Bernard and Tristan Jones both stayed with me for a couple days — they were doing lectures throughout California, and would hitch rides to SoCal or wherever to give their lectures. That was a most memorable time: boisterous Jones and introspective Moitessier. Jones loved to talk. Moitessier loved to listen with a cigarette in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. There was never a sailing question I asked that couldn't be answered by those two!

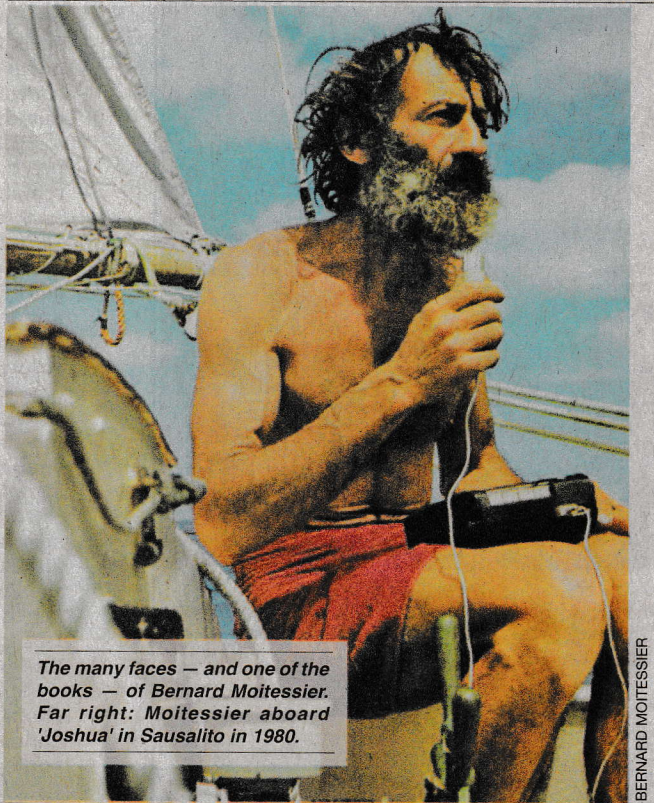
"Moitessier sailed off to the South Pacific again when his boat was finished, and I never saw him again. We exchanged a couple letters. I will always miss him; his philosophy and joy of life, his advice. He was an absolutely super guy; truly

one of a kind. I wouldn't trade that friendship for anything in the world. Thanks for publishing that memory."

Nick Halkowski said he first read Moitessier's *The Long Way* in college at Cal in 2010. "I had read *A World of My Own*, Sir Robin Knox-Johnston's account of the same race many times, and was struck by the differences between the Frenchman's story and Johnston's. You would think they were in completely separate races on different bodies of water, when in reality they were in the Southern Ocean at the same time. Moitessier talks of his relaxed nights watching the sun go down behind him as he rolls along, while Johnston is continually fighting *Suhali* and apparently just barely surviving, though at all times with the requisite 'stiff upper lip' of British sailors. On both my longer trips I've tried to emulate the yogi-calm of Moitessier, though inevitably end up cursing and yelling like Johnston."

Patrick Kohlman said that "anyone who has spent any length of time in the open ocean understands what Bernard is talking about: what he says makes perfect sense to me. The rhythm of life at sea, the natural progression of day into night, and the creatures around the boat all become a web of your daily routine, inseparable from life aboard.

"The Dragon, as Bernard calls it, is different for each person. For my father, it was the uncertainty of navigation, where we were, and what nautical hazards we might encounter. For my mother it was her tenuous relationship with my father. For me it was the uncertainty of my relationship to both of them. I didn't know enough about sailing at the time to be afraid of the sea. For my younger brother it was his isolation from his friends back on land and his future stretched out before him.



The many faces — and one of the books — of Bernard Moitessier. Far right: Moitessier aboard 'Joshua' in Sausalito in 1980.

BERNARD MOITESSIER

bernard moitessier

You can be selfish living at sea. As long as you take care of the boat and are a fairly competent sailor, you can do what you like when you like, because there are no deadlines or demand on your time by others. You are truly free, perhaps for the first time in your life. It can become addictive. The constructs of society and the petty squabbles that living on land creates fall away. No one owns the sea. We are just passing through. It is timeless."

Ron Kucera, who didn't start sailing until his mid-50s, said he was heavily influenced by Moitessier and eagerly lapped up his books. "But I didn't start sailing until 2009 and Moitessier's books were a big part of my education and motivation.

"I bought *Mar de Luz* [a 1966 Spencer 42] in 2010 with barely a year of sailing under my PFD; I sailed her in the Bay Area for a couple of years, slowly gaining more confidence in my sailing and singlehanded abilities. Since 2012 I have taken a few months off each winter to singlehand *Mar de Luz* down the coast, leaving her in different places at the end of each season — Puerto Chiapas, MX; Bahia de Caraquez, EC; Taboga Is., Panama; Iquique, Chile; and this last season, from Iquique to Valdivia, Chile. Along the way I made several offshore detours, including the Galapagos, Juan Fernandez Archipelago, etc.

"Next season I plan to sail the canals of Patagonia and hopefully around the Horn; not necessarily the way Bernard did it (I call my approach the 'Chicken Shit Way' as opposed to 'The Long Way') but a "way" none-the-less. I still have all his books on *Mar de Luz* and dig in every once in a while.

After reading Moitessier's books, Barry Spanier wrote to the Frenchman, starting in 1969. "I used his 'address' in Ahe,

Tuamotus, and got a wonderful reply back about four months later. This started a regular correspondence over the next few years and he was very faithful to answer all of my stupid questions and freely gave me great advice.

"When I sailed *Seminole* south in 1977, Ahe was our first stop and we spent about a week working with Bernard on his garden and helping to build the fish traps (we would see him occasionally in Tahiti and Moorea). He was living there and just hanging out while the kid went to school and Helene did her Batik art. He asked me to build him a new mainsail for *Joshua*. As soon as we were back in Maui, we made him a sail just like he ordered . . . all the chafe patches, roping, deep reefs etc. He paid us and we sent the sail down by a way I can't remember, but he got it and used it enough to write us a letter of thanks. Not long after, *Joshua* was wrecked in the great Cabo gale. Who knows, that sail might still be with the boat. When John Hutton was building Bernard his final steel boat, we talked again but only a brief word or two. It was terribly sad when he passed too soon (but you can't breathe through Gauloises all day and be OK).

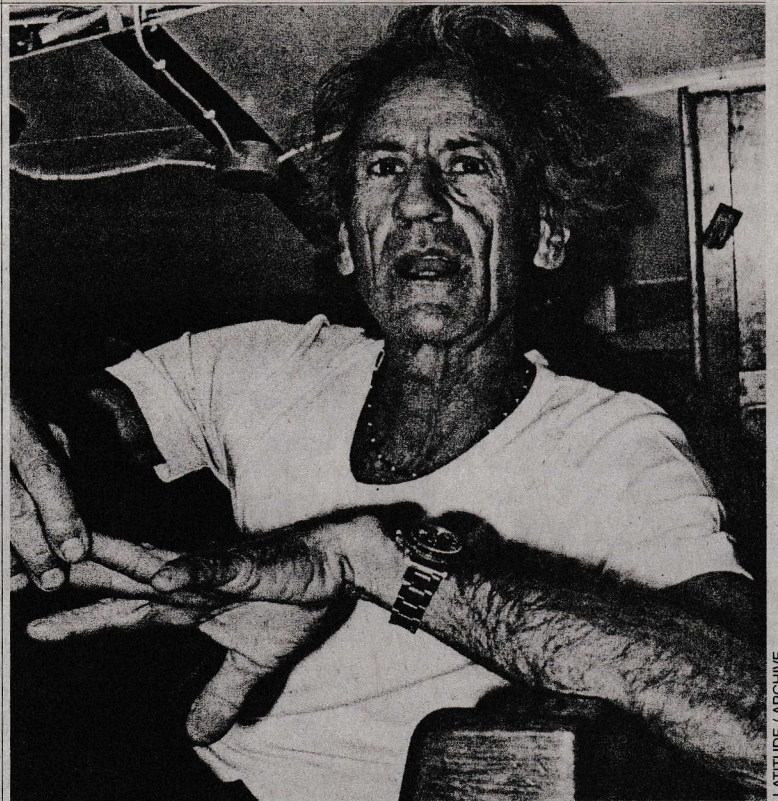
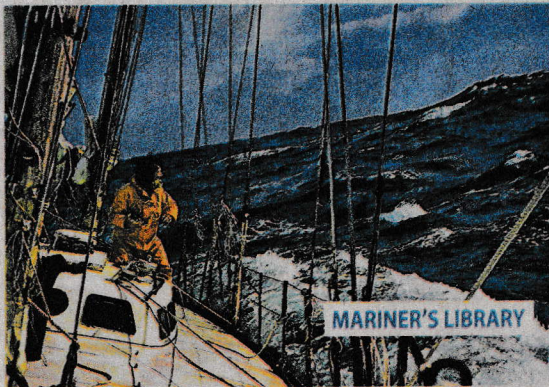
"There was simply no one like Moitessier, who was unique to the world — especially at that time. He had a way of speaking about the sea that took fear away and made me realize all was possible without needing a 'yacht'. When we first met face to face, he was exactly as he projected in his writing. We shared our last oranges from the Big Island and partook in the last of our Big Island weed, and I felt like my own journey took a big leap, meeting him was like finding your guru. Thank you, Bernard, for everything. Aloha."

— tim

Bernard Moitessier

THE LONG WAY

SHERIDAN HOUSE



LATITUDE / ARCHIVE