

Jesse Martin

The Journey of *Kijana*

The dream was monumental – a group of young people sailing around the world, visiting remote places, exploring the environment, undertaking research, running an on-line classroom and making a 13-part documentary - not to mention the planned adventures like surfing in Indonesia, snowboarding in the Himalayas, rafting down the Congo, para-gliding in Peru and scuba diving off the Galapagos.

The inspiration came from Australian Jesse Martin, the youngest person to have sailed solo, non-stop and unassisted around the world, and was conceived during his circumnavigation. He dreamed about visiting the places he was sailing past, meeting and filming the local people and broadcasting it, in order to inspire other young people to achieve their dreams. "I want to ... break down the myths that surround the process of making dreams come true," he said.

Called the Journey of *Kijana* (Swahili for 'young people'), the adventure took two years to plan and was well organized and structured. Together with business partner, Phil Gregory, Jesse formed a company to manage the project and generous sponsorship was secured from some high profile companies.

Jesse chose a 54-foot cutter-rigged ketch, built of kauri and tallow wood to an old American East Coast fishing boat design. The crew consisted of Jesse, 20, as skipper and director of the documentary, his brother Beau, 18, as chef and photographer, friends Josh Schmidt, 21, resident comic and director of photography, and Mika Tran, 23, writer. The fifth crewmember was Nicolette Fendon, 22, from Michigan, USA, who was selected shortly before departure from applicants around the world. Her role was mechanic and activities coordinator.

The Final Episode

by Briar Jensen

The crew underwent months of training, including sailing lessons for Josh and Mika, and courses in rescue diving, celestial navigation, first aid and computer editing programs.

So why did the adventure begin to disintegrate before it left Australian waters and collapse after only a year, despite achieving many of its goals? There is no single answer. It is a complex mix of issues including commercialization of the dream, diverging visions, personality differences, poor communication, weak captaincy, ill-defined crew roles, seasickness, homesickness and lovesickness. Even boat layout and initial route may have played a small part.

Initially, Jesse didn't want to do the trip with corporate sponsorship. "I wanted to demonstrate the

dream could be lived by anyone, not just someone with a brand name behind them." However, in order to convert the dream to reality, he forsook this ideal.

The project grew much bigger than he planned. Deferring to Phil's business decisions, some of which he didn't agree with, ultimately frustrated Jesse. He says the constraints placed on the trip by the commercial aspect became increasingly at odds with what he believed the trip was about and compromised his role as skipper. Yet Phil denies there were any constraints.

Jesse explains, "Phil had the pressures from the office and they had to be balanced with the pressures I felt out at sea. So we were balancing things from the exact opposite side. We both had jobs that the other didn't fully understand. Once we got out to sea was when the compromises I'd made started to really get to me."

After a shakedown sail from Melbourne, *Kijana* departed Sydney Harbour on 24th March 2002, headed for Papua, New Guinea. However, unfavorable weather and broken dinghy fastenings saw them head to Coffs Harbour on the Australian East Coast, where it was decided they would continue up the coast instead. Already, hints of discontent were surfacing.

Tension Emerges

While the crew had prepared for most cruising eventualities, they had seriously underestimated the destructive power of crew conflict. While they expected disagreements, they thought they would be able to talk them through. In fact, the opposite happened.

As early as 12th April, Mika wrote, "We all seem to be thinking and feeling so much and yet saying so little." Homesickness also affected all but Jesse and Beau. A few days later there was talk of accusations, alliances, strategies and backstabbing.

The decision to sail up the Australian Coast may have contributed to the crew not melding together as a coherent working team. The short sails wouldn't have

allowed the girls to overcome their seasickness, thereby enabling them to pull their weight as crew. Their cabin, totally separate from the saloon and accessed only via the cockpit, may have strengthened their alliance and feelings of alienation.

Jesse, a quiet, almost introverted person, whose sailing experience was predominantly solo, says he is so steadfast in living his dream he often ignores those around him, and admits, "I should have been more sensitive to the difficulties the crew might have in adjusting to life on the boat." He now realizes that, as skipper, he should have taken control of the situation early on and talked it through. Phil now regrets not insisting Jesse undergo leadership training pre-trip.

The crew spent three days in Cairns being brutally honest 'talking, listening and soul searching,' after which relationships appeared to improve. Nicolette wrote, "It

feels like we're moving together more as a team instead of five people co-existing."

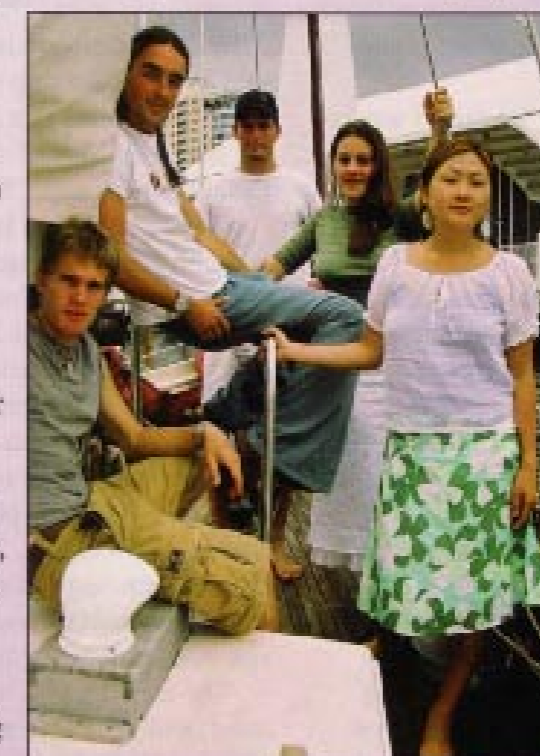
Moving Forward

On route to Lizard Island, *Kijana* had a problem of a more physical nature. They ran aground on a reef. While they were able to get off, it was not without drama, "It felt as if we were tearing the keel off our timber boat," wrote Jesse. "There was even a fleeting moment when I thought we would sink the boat." The dilemma over whether Josh should film the incident or assist in the rescue, added to the tension. Thankfully, the damage was not structural and was later repaired in Darwin.

Anchored at Lizard Island, editing footage for the first documentary began, while Jesse

and Beau joined a dive research boat to learn about environmental threats to the Great Barrier Reef.

Jesse was then invited to appear on the David Letterman show in the US, "... the last thing I wanted to do was go and appear on an American TV show while I was supposed to be sailing around the world," he said,



but did so to convey the *Kijana* message. For the rest of the crew it was a frustrating time. Josh wrote, "Standing still feels like wasting time and makes me miss home."

Sailing toward Thursday Island, they had their first medical emergency. Josh, absorbed in reef spotting up the mast, forgot about the two wind generators. "The thud as my hand caught in the blade nearly had me falling down the mast." The crew were quick to act. Nicolette took a digital photo of Josh's injury, emailed it to the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne and within minutes, a doctor was telling them how to treat it.

There were other problems too. Their large dinghy and outboard were swept out to sea. A rope caught around the propeller in Gove – a dangerous situation given the crocodile-infested waters. As Jesse explained, "We [Jesse and Josh] ended up both going in armed with a knife each, one loaded spear gun (two loaded undies) and Beau on patrol up the mast."

The crew then spent five days with an Aboriginal family in Arnhem Land, immersing themselves in Aboriginal culture. The guys made spears and went hunting for mud crabs, while Nicolette and Mika joined the young girls searching for mangrove worms.

It proved a poignant time for Josh. "So there I was, a vegetarian for 15 years before this trip, now bent over a crab with a belly full of worms and crabmeat. Felt like a caveman. Felt good."

Crew Changes

However, crew tensions remained and when *Kijana* arrived in Darwin, Mika and Nicolette left, claiming irreconcilable differences. The reality was that, from early on, Jesse felt the girls did not fit in or pull their weight, but was influenced to keep them on. One of the reasons was the possibility of a U.S. sponsor pulling out if Nicolette left, which it did.

At this point, Jesse wanted to bring his girlfriend onboard, Maya Knight, whom he'd met shortly before departure, but said he wasn't allowed to because of "how it may look to people." Phil believes Maya didn't have any skills to bring to the team and that the relationship between her and Jesse might have destabilized the crew.

Yet after hauling out for repairs and maintenance, the crew recruited Danish backpacker, Maria Anderson, for the trip to Indonesia. While Maria fit in well, the decision to allow her onboard seems rather hypocritical, as apart from being well traveled, she appears to have had no more skills than Maya and could have potentially destabilized the crew also.

Departing Australia

After finally departing Australian waters for Timor, *Kijana* attracted some unwanted attention. An Indonesian sailing vessel changed course and headed toward them. As it approached, Jesse saw about eight people on board, two crouched in the bow and one at the back, waving a cloth. "We've heard stories of pirates posing as local fishermen wanting help and coming aboard, only to pull out a machete or firearm," said Jesse, so he fired up the engine and motored away, after which the local vessel resumed its original course. "Was it a close call? We'll never know," said Jesse, "but we're still alive."

After arriving in Kupang, Timor, the crew were quick to befriend the locals. However, after accepting a ride with a stranger who said, "Hey Mister, you be my friend?" they had second thoughts when they found themselves in the 'middle of nowhere' surrounded by Timorese. Josh recalls, "It's about now that we realize what's happening. ... I say politely, 'Are you going to shoot us?' but their English isn't so good, so they just nod and smile."

After being forced to walk down a steep, dark cave, they finally reached their destination.

"The seven Timorese laugh at the looks on our faces," said Josh, "as we strip off and dive in, swimming in crystal blue water in a cave in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of Timor." Josh turned to the guy who drove them there and said, "Hey Mister, you a good friend."

Shortly after, they left for nearby islands to go surfing and film Komodo dragons. It was at a sacred site on one of these islands that Jesse, along with other cruisers in the bay, celebrated his 21st birthday on the beach with goats sacrificed by generous locals.

From there it was on to Sulawesi, where in a cave in the highlands, the crew met locals from an earlier time. "The cave was so small that we had to walk on our hands and drag our feet, through piles of cockroaches and past huge spiders..." wrote Josh, "But we weren't alone in the cave. We were crawling past piles of human bones. Outside in the cliff face, old coffins hang from wooden poles and life-size wood carvings of the dead guard the entrance."

The crew had been invited to the burial cave by a local, and soon afterward were privileged to be part of a five-day funeral ceremony. However, coming to terms with the local custom was not easy. One hundred pigs, 40 buffalo, a deer and a pony were sacrificed and eaten. "At first it seemed barbaric," said Jesse, "but the family told me they believed the animals would carry the dead to paradise." With the buffalo worth about AUD\$2000 each, there was no



way Josh could explain that he didn't want to eat it. "To people with very little, anything they offered was a huge gesture."

The crew arrived in Bali shortly after the bombing and were sobered by their visit to the Sari Club site. Jesse later wrote that this was a turning point "... the journey seems different now... Paradise seems a long way from where we thought we'd find it."

Maria returned to Australia to continue traveling with her brother while the others sailed on to Borneo and trekked through unmapped jungle in search of nomadic Punans. While initially frustrated at not finding them, Josh learned to appreciate the Dayaks they met, as this description shows. "He had his blow dart out, they'd slept the night on the floor [of a logging shelter] and now their tattooed, long eared old bodies were crouched over a pot of monkey stew. Sure, he was wearing a baseball cap and had a pack of Marlboroughs, but he was as untouched as I needed to find."

Beginning of the End

A friend of Beau's joined the crew for the sail to Thailand, but the exotic location couldn't dispel Jesse's growing discontent. "I was doing things in a way I didn't want to do them," he said. "Certain aspects of the trip (most of which people never saw or knew about) had grown into something I didn't want to stand for." And he was desperate to be with Maya.

When Beau quit unexpectedly in December, Jesse and Josh flew home for Christmas. In the New Year, Jesse pulled out of the journey saying, "I couldn't continue on a trip I didn't agree with." He signed the captaincy over to Josh, who was determined to carry on, saying, "... a lot of the issues he [Jesse] had with the trip are not my issues." Together with Phil, he tried unsuccessfully to raise funds to continue. The trip was over.

Whatever Jesse's reasons, it takes courage and conviction to pull out of such a high profile venture. He is being very diplomatic, not blaming anyone, but taking full responsibility and intends repaying his debts.

Despite the demise of the adventure and the disappointment of thousands who followed it through the *Kijana* website, which received over two million hits a month, the crew believe the trip was still a success, but for reasons they hadn't anticipated.

"I've learnt a lot and know how I would do it in the future and that knowledge is priceless," says Jesse.

For Josh "... the journey was a success, for the people it reached and the idea that it was. *Kijana* has been just one amazing learning experience in the greater journey of life."

Part of this learning experience was shared through Jesse's book, *Dream On*, released in November 2002, which covers the preparation and early part of the voyage. It will continue with a documentary currently being made from the 160 hours of footage shot by the crew.

Jesse's only regret? "That people are disappointed. I hope they see the documentary and take something good from it." As he says in his book, "Dreams are not all glory and success, but without them, what is life?" ☪

