



Kai Ohana

and the Bach Family

by
Chiles T. A. Larson

Phileas Fogg and his faithful valet, Passeportout, pulled off an amazing feat by circling the globe and collecting a £20,000 wager, albeit with many tight, unforeseen circumstances unfolding in Jules Verne's classic, *Around the World in Eighty Days*. However, for the Bach family out of Austin, Texas, the three-year time frame for their globe-circling odyssey onboard their refurbished 75-foot gaff-rigged wooden ketch, *Kai*

Ohana ("Ocean Family" in Hawaiian) is less time-sensitive on one level, but logistically staggering on others.

"In February 2008, we embarked on the adventure of a lifetime from our home of nearly two years on the island of St. Martin in the French West Indies," Captain Craig Bach wrote in the *Kai Ohana's* log entry. The family crew of six had spent those two years restoring their vessel that would not only carry them to the

four corners of the world, "but also provide us an opportunity to make a difference in that world."

The story of how Craig, his wife, Lauren, daughters Tracy, 22; Sara, 18; Alexis, 16; and their brother Preston, 20, found themselves pulling up their Texas roots for a life on the bounding main is instructive. Craig, like many fathers, was working to achieve the American Dream. His schedule as a green contractor was a



Kai Ohana (foreground) at anchorage at Marina Cay

(L to R) Tracy, Lauren, Alexis, Craig, Sara, and Preston Bach



torrid seven-days-a-week pace, often putting in twelve-hour days during a seven-year period.

Then in 1993 he realized the grind was producing little of what he was really interested in. He said he hardly remembered his children's names or what his wife looked like. He made the decision to take two years off to let Lauren explore her own career opportunities, while he took on the cooking and the various aspects of interacting with his children and their activities.

By 2006, the decision to sell their two businesses and their farm had been reached, and the purchase of the Italian-designed and built wooden staysail schooner called *Saudade* (Portuguese for "longing," as for an old friend or home), had been consummated. The Italian Minister of Transportation had initially commissioned her. It is believed he sold her to a group who fitted her out as a charter vessel, specializing in amateur treasure



Alexis Bach installing baggywrinkles

The welcome committee of local Haitians in dugout canoes alongside *Kai Ohana*



hunting off the east coast of Africa. Other exotic adventures and several years of neglect took their toll on her.

Once the Bach family purchased and rechristened her, a serious period of some 18 months was spent completely renovating the interior, sealing up the decks, replacing and/or rebuilding all of the electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems onboard, and reconfiguring her from a schooner rig to a gaff-rigged ketch. Asked if this made her easier to handle, Captain Craig said no, but added that the principal advantage is that the *Kai Ohana* is a softer and more flexible rig.

The *Kai Ohana* is now capable of flying some 2,400 square feet of sail. All the latest electronic navigation and communication gear have been installed, including five computers. She has a self-steering capability, a water maker, and her original Mercedes 350hp V-10 diesel engine is fully up to speed.

When I first spotted her tied up in the Hampton River in Tidewater Virginia, the crew had been spending the winter living onboard after sailing up from St. Martin, with stops in Haiti, Charleston, Beaufort and other Atlantic ports in the fall of 2008. Seen from the bridge over Settlers Landing Road, she impressed me with her no-nonsense lines, not necessarily as a beautiful sleek sailing yacht, but a comfortable, seaworthy craft that could carry a family wherever they might choose to take her.

Holding weekly meetings to thrash out any issue that might need consideration and to review every facet of the ship's operation is a major aspect of the younger crewmembers' education. "We run this as a business enterprise," said Captain Craig, "so the children have a voice in making decisions affecting our ongoing daily actions." Although they have spent a number of months at their Hampton River berth, the family members have not been idle. The youngsters are all engaged in various degrees of study. In fact, they had the good fortune to meet a retired teacher in

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