



BRIANT, Paul Stafford

Paul BRIANT | 25 Dec 1965

PAUL STAFFORD² BRIANT (MICHAEL¹) was born on 25 December 1965. He married MONTA ZELINSKY. Paul is the grandson of BARBARA ANNA⁷ FLEMMER (JOHN DISTIN⁶, CHRISTIAN LUDVIG⁵, CHRISTIAN AUGUST⁴,) born on 23 July 1910 in Boksburg, Transvaal, South Africa and died on 14 May 1984 in Umzumbe, Natal, South Africa. She married THEODORE MAURICE 'BILL' MAST on 31 March ? He was born on 3 March 1900 in Carolina, Transvaal, South Africa and died on 18 February 1996 in Durban, South Africa.

PAUL BRIANT - PERSONAL HISTORY WRITTEN IN JUNE 2004

I was born in the town of St. George's, Grenada in the West Indies on Christmas day (1am) 1965. I was delivered by the local midwife, a black lady called Mrs. Chichester. My parents were sailing around the Caribbean and my brother John had been delivered by the same midwife a year and a half earlier.

My father, Mike Briant, had had Ying Hong (a Chinese Junk) built in Hong Kong and sailed it from there to South Africa with some friends. In Durban he had met my Mother, Patricia Mast, (Daughter of Bill Mast and Barbara Flemmer). They got spliced and together they sailed round the coast of South Africa and then to the Caribbean. After I was born, they made their way through the Caribbean and the Bahamas to Florida and some time later sold Ying Hong in South Carolina. Being a wooden boat, she was just too much maintenance for a young family. My parents flew to England where my father's family was. Relations between my father and his parents were not very good. The story behind this is interesting.

My father's Grandfather, Arthur Briant had a large family and seemed had a habit of running away to sea to escape his domestic duties. His wife (a very imposing and formidable woman) would go down to the docks if he disappeared, look through ships crew lists till she found his name and drag him back home to fulfill his responsibilities. Well one time he signed on to a big ship and changed his name so his wife couldn't find him. Unfortunately he signed on to the Titanic and being a stoker in the boiler room, was probably one of the first to die when the ship went down. This left his wife with nine kids to feed and no source of income. As her husband had changed his name on the crew list she could not prove he was on the ship and was not eligible for compensation. Arthur Briant being the eldest son was forced to go to work at a very young age. He apprenticed as a lock and safe smith and eventually became very sought after and cracked damaged safes and vaults that were bombed during the Blitz in London. He was also Locksmith to the Royal Family I believe. But the impact of the sea taking his father left an indelible mark on him and he never forgave his son (my father), for going to sea. He considered it to be very irresponsible. Consequently, my parents left England and moved to South Africa and I only met my grandparents once after that and can't really remember them.

We settled in East London in 1969 in an old wood and corrugated iron house in Amalinda. It had no city water supply only a large underground tank to collect rainwater. It was often full of mosquito larva and who knows what else floated around in that tank. The only electricity we had was for light. We had a wood burning water heater and alcohol stoves to cook on. The place was crawling with rats, mice and frogs and puff adders. On a number of occasions we found LARGE puff adders inside the house. The property was large and in a very rural setting with only scattered neighbors. We had every kind of fruit tree one could imagine and some we had never heard of or seen and have never seen since. A lasting impression of my childhood there is eating fruit, fruit and more fruit.

My brother and I went to Amalinda primary school. This was a one roomed school building and the teachers wrote their lessons on a blackboard and easel. Some of the kids rode to school on horseback and tied their horses up outside the school building. I was only there a year when they built a huge, beautiful new school and called it Crew Primary.

My father started building a new boat out of Ferro cement and the plan was to go cruising again in a couple of years. Well the difficulties of working an eight-hour day to support a family and make time for some recreation to keep two young active boys stimulated took their toll on the boat building process and the years went by so fast. Most weekends the whole family "worked" on the boat and I remember helping my father bend steel pipes for the boat's frames and then tie a grid work of 1/4 inch rods over the frames and then cover each side of the grid work with five layers of chicken wire. This involved tying thousands of wire ties to hold the wire matrix to the grid. A time-consuming and laborious task.

My brother and I and friends spent our free time when we weren't "building the boat", playing in the bush. From sun up to well after sundown we lived the dream of every young boy. Surrounded by bush and with a small dam and lots of streams to play in, a full workshop with all the tools and supplies to build weapons and canoes, we had all that

young boys could ask for. On long expeditions, we would hack our way with pangas (machetes) through impenetrable jungles. We got a sheet of corrugated iron, had a convenient road construction crew run over it with their steamroller, and then bent it into the shape of a canoe. With a piece of two-by-four at each end, some nails and some roofing tar and we had ourselves a canoe in which we spent hours fishing in the small dam, with muddy pieces of white bread. One piece on the hook the other in our mouth. We would be called back to the house for dinner, mostly as it was getting dark by a long blast on a Conch horn that we could hear from miles-away in the bush.

Our June/ July school holidays were spent with our grandparents. Bill and Barbara Mast had built a house together with Hal Mast-Ingle, Bill's nephew, on the south coast of Natal in the tiny town of Umzumbe. The house was right on the beach and we spent all day playing and fishing in the warm Indian Ocean. Coming back only to stuff down a pile of boiled cabbage, boiled potatoes, boiled chicken and huge mounds of stewed prunes and custard, papaya, bananas and jelly.

The weather and surroundings were tropical. The days a blur of warm salty waves, chewing burnt sugar cane, coarse golden beach sand and the shimmering, silver, teeming life of the annual sardine run. These were the happiest, most fun filled days of a very happy, fun filled childhood. A time of complete freedom. We went wherever we wanted, whenever we wanted, totally unsupervised with not a care in the world, in a time of innocence that has since passed and which my children will probably never experience.

In 1976 with the hull of the boat complete but my parents leather- work business battling to support a growing family and boat, my father got an offer of a position as Master of a salvage tug in Cape Town. We packed and moved down there, leaving the boat to be collected later.

We loved Cape Town with its beautiful mountains, great diving, sailing weather and every outdoor activity that two (almost) teenage boys could want. Having come from a friendly, small rural town to, the big sophisticated cosmopolitan city I found people aloof and unfriendly. It took some adjusting to get used to this and not feel like the country bumpkin and I found it hard to relate to a lot of the kids who were born and raised in the city. Our priorities and values were so different.

For the first few years we lived in Wynberg and my brother and I went to Golden Grove primary in Rondebosch from Std. three to Std. five. It was pretty good school with some excellent teachers. Then we went to high school at Wynberg Boys- a really great school. Although I was never a great student, there were some wonderful teachers there that were passionate about their subjects and managed to sow a few tiny seeds of that passion in a few of those ungrateful little twerps who were lucky enough to be their students. Other teachers just resorted to beating it in to us with the cane or cricket bat... a system that despite today's modern thinking works surprisingly well on a mob of rambunctious teenage boys.

Unfortunately the schools main focus and obvious source of pride, was not so much to get us to attain academic excellence but to have us kick the crap out of whatever school we happened to be facing on the rugby field that Saturday. Those who excelled on the sports fields were held up as heroes and lords while straight A students were seldom recognized or acknowledged. Hence I buried myself in sports of every kind, in and out of school to the exclusion of all else in life except "working on the boat". Yes we had brought the boat down from East London to Cape Town by truck. Stuck it in our back yard and worked on it every spare minute when we weren't diving, surfing, playing rugby or climbing mountains.

In my last year of high school, my parents bought an old convent in Simonstown that belonged to the Dominican sisters. They called it "Topsail House" and as far as I know it is still there. It was right next to the naval dockyard and having launched the boat and put it on a mooring in Simons Bay, it was easy for my parents to get to the boat to work on it. The involvement of my brother and me in this project, I am ashamed to say, had virtually ended as we were too involved in schools and sports. I got into paddle surfing, entered a lot of contests and lived and breathed surfing and still do to this day. Some of my best memories of Cape Town are surfing the crystal clear, icy cold waves of Noordhoek, Llandudno, Sandy bay and Kommetjie with a stiff South Easter blowing the spray into huge rainbows and the beautiful green mountains rising up from those sparkling white beaches...not a cloud in the sky and the sun beating down and causing heat waves to shimmer on the beach while the sea is as cold as melted ice.

My father had left the salvage tug after some notable and very interesting salvages: Pulling a large Taiwanese fishing trawler off the rocks at Cape Agulhas which the whole family went along on the ship for. My brother and I spent seven days in our bunks throwing-up while they slowly clawed that ship off the rocks and then even more slowly dragged her back to Cape Town. A near miss; being dragged backward towards Wittle rocks in False Bay with both engines full ahead and both anchors down, while trying to tow a giant oil drilling platform in the teeth of a north westerly gale. To name only two.

He joined the largest fishing company in the Southern Hemisphere, Irving and Johnson as Marine Manager and worked there till my parents left Cape Town on the "new" boat Chi Lin in 1994.

After finishing high school in 1984, I went to Cape Technicon to study Plastics Technology. Neither my head nor heart was in it and I did just enough to squeak through. I did learn a lot of physics and materials science which would help me a lot in my future careers but there was a lot more I could have learnt which would have helped me even more. My head was in the surf and my heart was elsewhere...I had discovered girls. Half way through my diploma, I got a job with company that manufactured fiberglass signs. I did quality control and research and development for new products and went to school part time.

In 1988 I had to do my two years national service which was mandatory in South Africa at that time. My father being in the marine industry, knew a lot of influential people. Therefore, I was one of the lucky ones who's Daddies managed to wangle them a call-up to the Navy and not the army, which was a lot tougher and you stood a good chance of getting sent to the Border area where South Africa was fighting a guerilla war with Cuban backed Angolan forces. Imagine my shock when they took one third of the Navy intake and put us in The Marine Corp. One day we were living the life of Reilly in the blue navy, the next day we were being chased up hill and dale from pre-dawn till night by a bunch of brutal Leading Seaman with no officers to keep them in check. We were sent off to a tent camp two mile from the Blue navy base and in the evening all the officers would leave and go back to sleep at the Blue navy base, leaving us to the tender mercy of the instructor Killicks. At the end of the three-month basic training half of my platoon of 40 had been medically reclassified because of shin splints, broken legs, torn knees and ankles etc. They found-out I was blind in my right eye (the result of a dart accident when I was five) and reclassified me but because I was so far along in the training, they made me a company clerk and I was based at Marine School in Simonstown for the rest of my two years. It was a position that came with a lot of privileges. I could sleep off base and had a lot of privileges that the officers had. I saw three more intakes of boys come through marine school and be turned into men before my eyes. This was probably the greatest privilege. I learned a tremendous amount and even though I hated it a lot, a lot of the time, I have never laughed and cried so much in such a short time. There were times of pure terror, absolute beauty, tremendous camaraderie, intense hatred and sublime poignancy.

After the Marines I went back to work at what was now Clarion Sign Systems. In 1990, we came in to work one day, and the company had closed its doors. Out of work and looking for something more stimulating, my bother told me to join him working on boats in the Mediterranean. John had followed in my father's footsteps and joined the merchant navy. He attended the General Botha like my father and then worked for Safmarine - one of the two big South African shipping companies. After a few years of this, he realized that it was not the career it had once been in my father's day. He left after getting his first mates ticket and went to work on luxury yachts in the Med. This sounded like my type of thing so I bought a one way ticket to Paris, said goodbye to my mother and promising my girlfriend of five years that I would be back when I had saved a bit of money, I boarded the plane and never looked back.

Joining my brother's boat, "Balmoral", in Cannes, France, we sailed for Palma de Mallorca, an island off the coast of Spain. I got off there to look for day work on various boats. There was not a lot of day-work around and I was starting to run out of money. I determined that if I got a job, I would work longer harder and smarter than anyone else on the dock. I was lucky and found day-work on 76 ft sailboat "Leonora". The skipper of "Leonora" like my work ethic and decided to keep me on till the end of the summer.

All the boats were getting ready to cross the Atlantic for the winter season in the Caribbean, I had resolved to stay in Palma for the winter and work and save money, but after a bust-up with my girlfriend over the phone, a week later, I was on a fifty foot sailboat heading for the Caribbean. Apart from me there were two guys and a girl and we picked up another girl as crew in Gibraltar. She was an Irish girl who, with no money had been living on a raft in the harbor. After a very eventful crossing including a couple of knockdowns, we arrived at the island of Dominica with no water, no food, no engine and broken steering. We made our way to Antigua for New Years Eve 1991 and left for Miami the night that the first Gulf War- Desert Storm started. We arrived in Miami and I spent three months there trying to eke out a living as an illegal alien. Realizing this was not working, I went up to Fort Lauderdale where there was more work on boats.

Shortly after this I met Monta, my future wife. When I met her I had \$15 to my name. In a bar, I bought her a drink, managed to lose the ten dollars change and was penniless when she left two days later on a job that took her from Florida to Chicago and then New York by boat on the intracoastal waterways. She kept in touch with me and I had found some good work re-finishing a boat's interior. I worked 12 to 14 hours a day seven days a week. On her return, we both had heaps of money (for us in those days), so we rented a car and drove to New Orleans for Fourth of July.

Monta and I got on so well so we decided to start working together as chef and mate on boats. We drove to Newport, Rhode Island for the summer season and after working on numerous boats together and apart that season, we flew back to her hometown of San Francisco to meet her family.

Her father Mike Zelinsky was in the process of losing his wife, his soul-mate and the love of his life Barbara to a brain tumor and I was privileged to meet her before her passing. Monta is a seventh generation native of San Francisco. When I met her family they were so loving and made me feel so a part of the family that I had no choice but to propose to her. We flew to South Africa in June and were married on the sixth in a small wedding at the Simonstown Marlin and

Tuna club. While in South Africa the skipper of "Leonora" called and asked us to come and help do a million dollar refit on the boat in Camden, Maine back in the States. We were thrilled. As we loved the boat and her crew. My hard work in Palma had paid off.

We flew from Cape Town to London and then on to Boston and spent the summer in gorgeous Maine. Lots of long hours and seven-day work weeks, then a delivery down to Annapolis in October and we drove back to Fort Lauderdale for the winter season. After a busy season of charters and freelance work, we got a delivery from Miami to Los Angeles via the Panama Canal on a 68 ft sailboat. We shortly realized that the skipper was an incompetent psychopath with a gambling problem. Three days into the trip, he gambled ten thousand dollars of the owners money away, leaving us with nothing for the rest of the trip. We stopped in Jamaica, and then, on the way to Panama, in the middle of the night, two days out of Panama, the propeller shaft broke off. We left the boat in Panama and flew to Costa Rica to visit Monta's Aunt and Uncle who live there. Then we flew back to San Francisco and stayed with Monta's Dad in his beautiful old Victorian house in the middle of San Francisco. We stayed the whole summer and both got our captains licenses. It was a wonderful summer of heat, dripping trees and swirling fog. At the end of the summer, we loaded up the little old car we had bought and drove 5000 miles across country to Fort Lauderdale again. This time, we were looking for a boat of our own to run.

We finally got one. It was a sixty-foot sailboat named "Onghiara" based in Turkey. The owner was German and lived in Hamburg. He and his family would come down to the boat in the summer and we moved it around to various exotic locations. We grew to really like and respect them. The first three years we would winter in Turkey. Come April, Dr. Huth and his wife would come down and we would spend a week cruising the beautiful Turkish coastline. Then we would take the boat to Greece, Crete, Malta, Italy, Sardinia, Corsica, Mallorca, then back to Turkey for the winter. It was a great life. A tremendous amount of hard work. Eighteen-hour days, seven days a week during the summer, but seven weeks paid vacation over the winter and plenty of downtime when the owners were not on board helped keep us reasonably sane. In the four years we were on Onghiara, the longest Monta and I were apart was five hours. Otherwise we were together every minute for four years.

In 1996, we brought "Onghiara" across the Atlantic and hired my father as crew. It was a great crossing and the first time I had spent any decent amount of time with my father since I was very young. He was the best crew anyone could ask for and my respect for him grew more daily. He was an old salt in the classic sense. He would wash his clothes by tying them to a rope and dragging them behind the boat for a few hours, hang them up to dry and put them right back on without even rinsing them. The salt never bothered him and neither did the sun as I have never seen him put on sunglasses. We arrived in Antigua just before New Years Eve. After a few months in the Caribbean and the Bahamas, we took the boat to Fort Lauderdale and then up to Maine for the summer. While there we drove up to visit my parents who were on their boat in Nova Scotia. I hadn't seen my mother in four years!

We stopped in Newport Rhode Island at the end of the summer and started a large refit which we continued in Fort Lauderdale. After a crazy, stressful, exhausting, two month refit, we took Dr Huth and his family back to the Bahamas.

By this point we had decided we had had enough of the nomadic life and wanted to settle down. We had bought a house in San Diego which we had rented out. We wanted to start a family and the professional yachting life was wearing thin. The Huths were wonderful people and we couldn't have asked for a better relationship with an owner but it was time to part ways. We agreed that on our return to Fort Lauderdale we would hire a new crew, train them and help them to take the boat to Bermuda. This we did and after a very rough trip to Bermuda we flew back to Miami and then to Cape Town for a well deserved vacation.

Susan, Monta's sister and a very good friend of ours Vicki, joined us for an incredible Safari in Botswana. This was probably one of the most incredible experiences I have had in my life... it was that good. After six weeks in South Africa including a trip down the Orange River, we flew back to Fort Lauderdale, picked up Monta's brand new SUV and my parents and embarked upon a 6000 mile zig-zag trip to San Diego, via almost every tourist attraction on the route.

We got to San Diego and I loved the house. Monta had bought the house without me seeing it a year before when we were in St. Thomas. It is an old craftsman. Built in 1911, it was our dream house. My parents helped us move in and did more work than four people half their age.

The transition from luxury yacht captain and chef, making loads of money, to a shore-based career was a difficult one for both of us. We tried our hand at numerous things and all the dreams and schemes we had all seemed to come to naught. We thought if we just worked really hard at whatever it was, it would work. That had always worked for us before. But no one would give us the chance. After two years things were getting desperate. Then in 1999, I got a job with a large boat dealership called H&S yachts. I worked longer, harder and smarter than anyone else and they liked what they saw so they promoted me rapidly and I am still with them. The company is owned by two wonderful, caring guys who are not just in it for the money.

In March 2000, our first child, Sirena Barbara Briant was born. She has been the absolute delight of our lives and we

feel very blessed and privileged to have her in our lives. When Sirena was an infant we started to teach her "baby sign language" and she became very good at it. Monta started teaching workshops to other parents to learn baby sign language and has become somewhat of a leader in her field on the subject. In 2003 Monta wrote a book called "Baby Sign Language Basics: Early Communication for Hearing Babies and Toddlers" for a large multi-national publisher and it sold over 20,000 copies in 6 months. This was not the first book she has written. Before Sirena's birth, she sat down and wrote a huge book entitled "A Career as a Yachting Professional: A Practical Guide to Crewing Careers Aboard Luxury Yachts". It was magnificently researched with maps, charts and photos, but it was shelved when Sirena came along and so far, no publisher has picked it up.

We are expecting our second child any day now. A boy. He will be called Aiden Dean Briant.

Today is the 6th of June 2004, our 12th wedding anniversary. This seems a fitting place to end this story for now, but we look forward to many more adventures in the future!