

SHARON GREEN

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Donald Green and daughter Sharon in front of the Canada's Cup trophy at Royal Canadian Yacht Club in Toronto.



COURTESY SHARON GREEN

Years ago when I first started working at *Latitude 38*, I was instructed, when out on the water, to take lots of "splashy" and exciting racing pictures (Thank you, LaDonna). Sounded simple enough, but real-world experience taught me to truly respect those who are able to capture the sport's most vivid and dramatic moments. If conditions are good and there's lots of wind, be prepared to get tossed about the photoboot with reckless abandon (on the bow), spend lots of time cleaning saltwater off your lenses, and keep the camera on the subject matter, focused and ideally composed (try doing this while driving a small dinghy yourself!). At the end of the day, the joy of sifting through 600+ images awaits you so that you can find just a few that meet

'Geronimo' under spinnaker and blooper during the 1984 St. Francis Big Boat Series.

your editorial needs. It's challenging work in the best of times.

One of the world's top sailing photographers, with whom many of *Latitude's* readers are familiar, is Sharon Green. Sharon consistently presents the world of racing's eye-catching moments from spectacular vantages on the water or high above in a helicopter. But who is Sharon, and how did she get to where she is today? As it turns out, her personal life and her professional career are deeply intertwined.

"I grew up in Canada just outside of Toronto," Sharon says. And, just as casually, she mentions that her father, Donald M. Green, at age 18 was the sole Canadian aboard Irving and Electra Johnson's brigantine *Yankee* on one of their around-the-world voyages. "He had seen Irving Johnson speak at one of his lectures in town, and he applied for a position to sail on the boat — that experience around the world really shaped his life — he kind of passed that down to me." In fact, he'd kept detailed, typed journals of the whole experience as well

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE LENS



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Above: 'Sorcery' and 'Boomerang' during the 1984 St. Francis Big Boat Series.

Below: Don Green at the helm with his all-junior sailing crew on board the C&C 38 'Motivation II' on Lake Ontario.

as handwritten letters to his mother and father — material that was the basis of *White Wings Around the World*, published in 1953 with co-author Jessie L. Beattie.

National Geographic covered the Johnsons' journey extensively, and their photographers had a profound effect on Donald, who came home and announced that he "wanted to be a filmmaker and photographer," says Sharon, laughing out loud. That desire and a Hasselblad camera were passed down to Sharon. "I grew up with salt in my veins, but I was raised on Lake Ontario," she quips.

While in high school and with an eye toward university in Toronto, Sharon found herself,

via a circuitous route, in a photography class. "I just took any class I could in high school that would give me the English credit I needed, and so I picked

up photojournalism," she says. In a remarkably modest statement, Sharon comments that she was very good in the darkroom but a terrible photographer. "I went to a special course one summer, I think I was 15 turning 16, in photography under a protégé of Ansel Adams. And once again I was really, really bad out in the field but much better in the darkroom." Her dream of being the next Ansel Adams was not to be.

It wasn't until her father's racing career ramped up that she began to realize her forte was not still photography, but the marrying of photography and sailing. This came about as a result of her father's campaigning *Evergreen* in the 1978 Canada's Cup. Lowell North was on the team, as were many other well-known sailors. After *Evergreen's* launch, Lowell asked Sharon if she'd mind developing his black and white photographs of her sails he'd taken that day. "I immediately was going, 'Oh, this is really cool; I can do this. You know, I'm really good at printing black and white!' So that's really where it all began — it's all Lowell's fault!"

"We had to do an emergency landing on Molokai."

Despite Sharon's aversion to still photography, she was actually thriving in photographing the sport she knew and loved. "Being on the water, bouncing around, manual everything, that was far more my forte than standing on terra firma and waiting for the light to be just right for some animal to walk across the picture." At the time, the industry was trending from black and white to color photography. "I definitely see the world in color. Racing back in those days was far more dramatic and colorful. When we used to have things called 'reaching legs,' and colorful boats with matching crew gear and spinnakers — I loved all that. I still love all that. I just wish somebody would do all that again."

At 18, Sharon attended film and photography school at Toronto's Ryerson University while covering the Admiral's Cup in the United Kingdom and getting her pictures published on the covers of sailing magazines. "My professors in school at Ryerson were very, very technical, and they didn't consider my work art. One day I'm standing there looking at a newsstand, and I had three covers on three different sailing publications at



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the same time, I'm getting paid money, and I'm thinking I'm probably making more money than those guys [the professors]."

It was an exciting time for Sharon. She was coming into her own as a professional and getting acknowledged for it. "I think about those days of poring through magazines and sailing publications and looking at how did they get that shot? And then, finally meeting all these celebrity sailing photographers and being able to go on press boats with them — all so cool to me. That came very naturally, that was super-easy."

The question was, how could she get more control over her images? Was she on the right professional path? Having hundreds of really good pictures is one thing. But the magazines were only publishing a few at a time. Sharon needed a more effective way to monetize her work.

The answer came to her on a ski lift in Utah in spring 1982. As she bemoaned her situation to a random fellow sitting next to her, he suggested she publish a

didn't know anything and ended up with cases of them in my car driving around door to door in Newport, RI, and Long Island Sound back in the days when we had ship chandleries and places that might want to sell it, and I had no idea what the wholesale price was." She quickly learned a lot about publishing, distribution and royalties. Over the years though, publishing the calendar has proven at times to be a walk in the park followed by periods of dramatic uncertainty. Fortunately, Sharon's images remain a constant.

One important aspect of her calendars is her aerial shots. Flying above starts and finishes gives Sharon a remarkable perspective that her audience loves. Asked if she, like this author, had any reservations about heights, she replied, "It doesn't scare me at all. I would never jump out of a helicopter, but I don't mind if the doors are off, and half the time I

Shooting from a helicopter during Key West Race Week.

aboard one during the 2019 Transpac. "We had to do an emergency landing on Molokai while photographing *Comanche* on the north side of the island at sunset, well off the Kalaupapa Lighthouse. We landed safely on the outskirts of the airport as the sun went down. We had to leave the helicopter doors off and take a private plane (my Uber) back to Oahu to catch *Comanche's* dock arrival around 9:30 p.m."

There was another instance that year, when "a large news drone" became an issue during the start of the race. "If it wasn't for helicopters though, I wouldn't be able to get half the shots that I get in the calendar."

When Sharon isn't dare-deviling aloft in helicopters, dashing around the planet chasing regattas, or editing the pages of her next calendar, she's often at home with her husband in Santa Barbara. Active members of Santa Barbara Yacht Club, they have two boats: a recently purchased powerboat and a Harbor 20 sailboat they enjoy campaigning in local races.

Because of health and safety measures, the official regattas have been canceled. But their "Harbor 20 gang," as she calls them (couples and "pod-oriented" folks), have started their own unofficial races. "We typically meet up at the gas dock in Santa Barbara and sail out, and we get on the radio and decide what course we want to do."

After finishing the race, there's another race back to the gas dock, which can be challenging because by that time the wind is dying and they have to resort to using their little "eggbeater" engine to get back to their slip. Post-race they might even stop by Brophy's for some tasty chowder and beer.

It's a far cry from what she does professionally, but very fun and down-to-earth, which is, by all indications, the kind of person Sharon is.

— **ross tibbits**



STEVE LARKIN



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'Merlin' with Bill Lee at the helm charging for the finish line in Transpac 2017.

coffee-table book. To this she replied, "No, I'm not quite that old yet." "How about 12 pictures for a calendar?" he replied. Skiing quickly to the bottom of the slope, she found a phone book and started calling print shops to see how much 5,000 calendars would cost to print. That was the beginning of Sharon's Ultimate Sailing calendar, which debuted in 1983.

The learning curve was steep. "I

don't even have a seat belt on because I'm moving around in the back so much. I like working the helicopter as it's pretty easy with a good pilot — and, you know, you're high and dry. When you're in the helicopter you can be just a couple of feet off the water still getting the same shots, only you aren't getting wet. But you're limited in that you typically only have one and a half to two hours of time, so there are limitations."

Helicopters are complicated machines, and sometimes things go awry or get in the way. Sharon found herself