

Team Sail Like a Mother

Interviewer: Jesse Wiegel

Interviewees: Katie Gaut, Melissa Roberts,

Brianna Randall

Q All right. So you're Sail Like a Mother, and you're coming to us for the 2024 Race to Alaska. And like any Race to Alaska fan who has been around for any length of time is going to hear sail like a mother and think what a rip off. You two just took a name that was out there and you threw another word on the end of it. So are you doing this to honor Sail Like a Girl or are you doing this out of sheer disrespect?

A Katie, go for it.

A Oh, man. I don't know how long it took us to come up with a name, a very long time. But actually, we spoke with Sail Like a Girl from the start, before we even announced our name, because we wanted to honor them and their

legacy. And we absolutely did not want to feel like we were ripping them off, and we actually got their blessing before we even went forward with that name.

Q Okay. So you spoke to Jeanne; you got her blessing. I would have advised you could have done it anyway without her blessing, but I think it's great that you did that. Are you going -- Sail Like a Girl, obviously a lot of people called them SLAG. Should we call you SLAM?

A Yeah, we've been going by that as well for sure.

Q Going by SLAM. Great. So your resumes, obviously that's the first step to anyone wanting to Race to Alaska, is you send in your adventure resumes and the vetting team looks them over. And I had -- reading your resume as they came in, you know when you look at a word too long or you say a word too many times and it starts to lose all meaning? You know what I'm

talking about? Like, what is this weird word?

Well, I started feeling that when I was reading your application because there was just like all of these, like, every type of adventure that I could imagine. Oh, canoeing in the Amazon, sailing to Tonga, trekking in Myanmar. Like, all of these things. So like do you feel like you're overprepared for Race to Alaska?

A There's no such thing, Jesse, as overprepared. Especially when you're on a small boat. I don't think any of us have ever done -- that's not true. Katie and I have been on a very small boat together for a very long time but the water was warmer.

Q Where was that?

A That was in Baja. We sailed with our now husbands. Katie got engaged on the trip. On a Catalina 22, we spent 12 days on it. We rotated who got to sleep in the tiny v-berth and who got to go ashore. And we all still like each other.

A Our husbands don't like to sail anymore and that was probably one of the reasons.

Q Okay. So you're still married but your husbands don't like to sail. That was another thing that I saw repeated a couple of times about how, oh, you know, through all these adventures I'm still friends with everybody I've ever sailed with and all that. And I think, like, is that bullshit or should people believe you when you say that?

A You can check references.

Q Yeah. There's been -- well, we believe there have been five divorces that have come about because of Race to Alaska. The three of you -- well, before we talk about whether the three of you are going to get divorces from each other, maybe just -- can you tell us like how this team came to be. Who was the instigator of this terrible idea and how did it happen?

A Katie was definitely the instigator. Katie has

been following the Race to Alaska ever since it started and she used to text me and Melissa, I bet you, updates like check it out, check who is in the lead. One day we're going to do this. And so she has been the driving force and is our captain for sure. And the pieces all just fell together for all three of us to make it happen this year.

Q Okay. So Katie is the captain. Are you -- you've all known each other quite a long time; is that right?

A Yeah, I've known Melissa over 20 years, and Brie over 15, probably 18.

Q Okay. So you're like -- you're the nucleus. Are the two of them going to be able to listen to your commands and follow through?

A Oh.

A Yes, we are.

Q Good.

A I am very good at listening to instructions.

A That's why we picked Melissa.

Q That's why you picked Melissa to be on the team.

Is that what you mean?

A Partly. Melissa, you want to tell him a little bit about your sailing experience?

A Oh, gosh. Really, I don't know if my sailing experience is the experience we want to talk about on this podcast. I live in a family of racers and have always enjoyed going out on sailboats and race boats. But I myself do not consider myself a sailor or especially not a racer. But I'm really good at following directions and being on a boat and pulling lines and sitting here and steering here and watching there. And really just being --

Q I mean, that's 99 percent, right?

A – a good humor person on the boat.

Q The person on the tiller is just pointing the boat, but the rest --

A I think so.

Q But also, what I'm seeing, the podcast listeners can't see because we are not technologically advanced enough to actually have video, but they can't see that you're sitting there in scrubs?

A Yeah, I'm about to go to work. I have a 12-hour shift overnight tonight.

Q And tonight you can expect all of the various wounds that one might see, gunshot wounds and people falling off of ladders and all those types of things. So I would imagine that you are already very much the ship's doctor. Would that be a correct assumption?

A The ship's nurse, absolutely, 100 percent.

Q Is there someone else who outranks you in the medical field?

A I don't think so.

Q I think we're going to have to call you the doctor then. Not to say that nurses are somehow lesser than but you know.

A Yes.

Q You are the extreme authority. Have you given much thought to how you might be employing your medical skills along the way?

A I have thought a lot about it actually. I've thought about what we need to bring, who we need to be able to call, what sort of things would be race enders. You know, there's a lot of things that can happen sailing out in Bellingham Bay that are pretty big deals -- pretty big deal. But we have quick access to a hospital. So yeah, I've been running through scenarios in my head, trying to think about what would be the things that we couldn't wait three to four days before we got to a bigger town.

Q All right. Let's run through a couple of these things. Very minor concussion. Somebody got boomed. Very minor concussion. We've got pupils are equal. We got no signs of traumatic brain injury over here, but we're maybe feeling a little low energy. How do we respond to that?

We are now -- let's say we are in Johnstone Strait.

A Yeah, that's probably not going to feel super good for the person who has that mild concussion. But really, the plan of care in a major hospital isn't going to be any different. We're going to monitor for changes. If something drastic changes that might be a call, but at that point, it's lots of rest, staying off the nav, not looking at little things, just monitoring.

Q But you're continuing at this point?

A Oh, yeah.

Q Oh, heck yeah. Okay. We have now encountered a heavy sea state, and there is just spray coming from every direction. We've torn some sort of exposure gear and Katie has been experiencing, like, moderate hyperthermia now for 36 hours. We are now approaching Bella Bella. What are we considering?

A And we just can't get her warm; we don't have our spare set of foulies; we haven't been able to cuddle up in a sleeping bag with her and feed her lots of warm liquids and all those things and she's still not warming up?

Q I think she's just not warming up. You're about to get into Bella Bella. Is this game ender, or are you going to hang out in Bella Bella, maybe avail yourself of the Sheerwater Casino for a couple of days?

A I don't think that's game ender, but we are going ashore and we are getting her warm.

Q Great. I think you're all in good hands for the medical side of things.

A Did I pass?

Q I'm going to stop my inquiry unless anyone else has any fears they want to allay at this very moment on the podcast. Okay. All right. So your boat, Santa Cruz 27 called Wild Card. It has been showing up in our races, the Northwest

Maritime Center races now for a bunch of years. 2018 it sailed as team Wild Card, and then again it sailed in Washington 360 in 2021 with Mark Aberle at the helm. Now, when you came together as SLAM, were you thinking Santa Cruz 27 or was this the boat that manifested?

A Well, originally it was Brie and I were going to do the race, and we were looking at smaller boats like Santana 20s, Montgomery 18s, really small boats. And I interviewed a whole bunch of folks who had done the race in those boats and for the most part across the board they said they'd love to do the race again. Not in that small of a boat. So we kept getting that feedback. And then Mark contacted me kind of on the side with the option to buy Wild Card, but we needed a third person to really make that happen, Brie and I felt like. So I didn't put a ton of thought into it, and then Melissa came to me one evening on the call -- we really hadn't

told many people that Brie and I were thinking of doing Race to Alaska at all. And I believe her words to me were, I heard you're doing the Race to Alaska. I'm coming with and there's nothing you can do about it.

A Actually, I think I said why haven't you invited me yet? And you know I'm coming.

Q So Wild Card came to you, like, decked out. She's got a pedal drive all put together by I think Turn Point Design in Port Townsend built that. So she's ready to go?

A Exactly. Yeah, the pedal drive has done the race three times and then the Washington 360 as well.

Q Okay. So I was curious. Mark, who obviously he did Washington -- he did Race to Alaska, Washington 360, and then in 2022, he joined Fashionably Late and took their Dash up and finished again. Now, in 2018, Mark I believe finished in third place on Wild Card.

A Third.

Q In 2022, Fashionably Late, aboard the good vessel Fighting Trousers, came in third place. Are you afraid that Mark is cursed, and are you afraid that his curse might follow you in Wild Card?

A Jesse, we would be shocked if we got third place. I'm going to just say it now. We are not in this to win it and if we get third place it will be because Mark cursed the boat in a good way.

Q I'll check with Mark on this point. I do want to let you know a little down and dirty dirt. You are likely not the only SC27 in this year's race.

A Oh, that's exciting.

Q And so you may have some folks to be fighting against. And that's all I'll say for now.

A I do have to say, Mark has been so wonderful and his whole team from 2018 has reached out and any

questions we have, I think I text Mark weekly for sure. And he's just a wealth of information and support and as well as anyone else who has done the Race to Alaska that I've reached out to has been amazing and humbling, just a level of support and family that you guys have created with Race to Alaska.

Q Yeah, it's pretty amazing stuff. Mark is a great guy. He actually brought his cruising boat up to Victoria last year, and during the layover between the two stages, he posted his boat up and was just a resource to everyone down on the dock. I'm hoping I can trick him into doing that again this year.

So I'm curious about your plan on the water. Are you sailing through? Are you anchoring down? Are you standing watches? What's your vision?

A I think our plan is to do a little bit of everything. We'll go forward when we can, and

if it makes sense to sail through the night and we're prepared to do so, we will. But we're also going to have the boat ready to anchor and we're not going to push ourselves unnecessarily. And we're going to sail a very safe boat and that's always going to be our first and primary concern.

Q Yeah, you've really got to sail when you can. I keep being amazed at a certain set of emails that drop into my inbox or in people's applications. I often see the phrase in the little part, what is your extra propulsion, what's your auxiliary propulsion, and people say things like, oh, we're bringing a stand up paddle because we plan to sail the whole way. And they're, you know, on a boat you're size or bigger. And I get a little confused by that as though people think it's a constant breeze. And anyone who has watched Race to Alaska knows you are going to spend days on the pedals or

paddles. So you mentioned that Turn Point Design has a well seasoned pedal drive. What are you doing to get ready to be power houses on the drives?

A I just did my 30 minute squats before this.

Q We got daily squats. What else are we doing?

A Daily to get those big muscles.

A I know that Katie has been on many meetings while pedaling under her desk and people are possibly curious about why she's slightly out of breath at all times.

A I'm not allowed to pedal on meetings anymore. My husband said that sounds very disturbing and he's worried about our clients.

Q And the other thing is when you're pedaling for 6 or 10 or 12 hours or two days, that means that there's just glassy water and a big bright sun in the sky. What are you going to do to fill that time? Is it music? Is it games?

A Both, for sure. I sailed for 33 days between

Panama and the Marquesas and I am a writer and I thought I'm going to get so much writing done. It's going to be amazing all those bright sunny days with nothing to do. And somehow I'm like where does the time go? Because all of a sudden you're like I fed myself; I kept warm or I kept cool; I slept; I did watch; I slept again. And then you're like, I wrote zero words in 33 days on that boat. So I know that the time goes fast. I also know the value of Scrabble, travel Scrabble, and the value of a sweet play list which we're all compiling and we're going to share.

Q You're going to share now for the fans?

A We're going to share -- sure, we'll share our play list for the fans. Why not. Spotify, SLAM Spotify play list. Everyone can listen along with us.

A And Brie has offered to teach us, Katie and I, how to salsa dance -- no, no, tango.

Q You're going to tango on the boat?

A Definitely. Small steps. Tango is known for small steps. We should be fine. Should be good. That way no hyperthermia if we tango.

A I'm kind of an introvert, so I'm looking forward to looking backwards because our pedal drive faces back. And just taking that as alone time. I don't know about if Brie or Katie would say that they're introverts, but quiet alone time isn't a bad thing in my world.

A And I feel like my -- I mean, one of the best things about this race is that Brianna and Melissa are my two nearest, dearest friends but because of family and our children and just distance -- Brie lives in Montana. And even Melissa is here in Bellingham but we don't see each other near enough. I'm just excited to have so much quality time with two of the most special people to me in my world. So that's just exciting in and of itself.

A And Jesse, let's not forget that since we're all mothers with young children, we think that quiet, long hours with no one going mom, mom, momma, mom, mom, is like basically paradise. It doesn't matter if it's rain, if it's blowing.

No one is talking to us but our own brains and like grown up women. Sounds like paradise.

Q Sounds pretty good. So let's talk about the kids part. Obviously you -- you value your roles as parents enough to name your team after it. What exactly are you telling your kids about why you're doing this race? Or you're just not telling them?

A I'm just not telling them that I'm going to race. They just think I'm going to take -- just kidding.

A I told my kids that I want them to know I can do hard things without their dad around to fix the diesel engine when it breaks because that has been the dynamic in our family for a long time.

Mom can sail the boat but as soon as something goes wrong, dad steps in to fix it. So my big goal for this race is to show that I can do it with my girlfriends and we are fully capable and I can remember how to fix things when they break.

A My son, Finn [phonetic], is seven, and I think he's also followed the race since he can remember. Because I've always been such a tracker junkie. So he's I think known I'm going to do the race probably before I even knew. And I think he has a good understanding of how difficult this race is because he's followed it with me. And so I think that's always been a goal of mine as a parent, is to just show that you can do anything you set your mind to it if you work hard enough. And I think our kids also get to see us working nonstop on this project, because it's so -- there's so much preparation, as you know. So I think he's excited to see us

off. And he's a little nervous, but I think it's important to just show him that we're still capable of getting out there and doing those hard things, but we have to work really hard for it even though it is a little bit scary.

Q Melissa, is there anything your progeny is thinking about your race?

A My kids are super excited. I have told them that you know, my role as their mother is that I'm most proud of and that is, you know, really a strong part of my identity, but that I'm also more than their mom, and that I need to still do things that help me be me and have nothing to do with that role. So I've told them that, that this is something I'm doing for myself and that I'm really nervous about. But that's okay, it's okay to be scared and nervous. It's okay to be vulnerable and not know if you're going to be able to do it or not, but still try for it. And my 12 year-old is -- loves sailing, so they're

super excited about this and can't wait to try
for a family go at it here in a couple of years.

Q Oh.

A And my 10 year-old is actually really scared.
So we have a lot of conversations about safety
and, you know, where our limits lie and so
that's been interesting. I think she's just at
an age where she's seen the movie and she's
really wearing this hard right now. And she is
nervous but we're talking lots about it.

Q Are your families going to fly up and meet you
in Ketchikan?

A Yeah, mine will hopefully.

A I think my kids are five and nine, and my
husband will come to the send off and then
they're going to drive up the coast of Vancouver
Island and maybe catch us. They've been wanting
to go check out Johnstone Strait and Campbell
River and black fish sound. But my husband and
I have sailed enough passages and so have our

children to know that they have no idea when we'll arrive so there's no use in booking a plane ticket.

Q That is true. That is true. We have every year there's always one or two family members who show up about nine days before their family shows up in Ketchikan. It's a good time. It's a really good time hanging out up there. We eat a lot of fish and chips.

So you are team SLAM. You're on a mission. Reading about your mission, and I can't put it into words but I was hoping that you might tell us a little bit about some of the deeper reason why you're -- why you're sailing for the ocean?

A So all of us have science degrees and we're all environmentalists and love the ocean. That's partly why we're doing this. And as such, when we sat down to think about it, like, can we spend a month of our life or more in preparation as well without giving back something to the

larger world? And so we thought how can we benefit the ocean and animals that we love to see while we're sailing? I have written stories about one group called Oceans Initiative and Katie has done GIS work through her company, blue water GIS for Oceans Initiative and so we thought they were a natural fit because they monitor marine wildlife specifically in Puget Sound. And one of the main focuses they have is seeing how noise, specifically from motors, affects marine mammals. And so as a motorless race, this is a perfect time to see what kind of noises we can pick up. So we're going to take a hydrophone with us, drop it overboard when we can and collect sounds for the Oceans Initiative scientist team. We're also going to work with them and a group called adventure scientists to try to replicate for other sailors how to take marine mammal counts as we go. So if we see them, jotting it down. We have a special tablet

and the adventure scientist group is trying to make it so that other teams, maybe even Race to Alaska or maybe other sailors out and about in the Pacific northwest and eventually beyond can collect data and use that data to help scientists who are trying to conserve these at risk animals.

Q That sounds awesome. Something to do while you're out there.

A Yeah, exactly.

Q Something to do that helps. Well, I think -- I think we've heard a lot. I'm wondering if you want to say anything out there to the race world?

A Well, I just want to say thanks to you guys. I know the Race to Alaska -- I can't even imagine how much work it is to put it on, and your guys' excellent coverage and all you guys do, so thank you guys for all you do to make the race possible.

Q And you're so welcome and we'll edit that back out. Or not. I don't know how we're feeling. Hey, it's been really great talking to you. I cannot wait to meet you all. I can't wait to see your -- to see your fan base grow. I know that you're already out there selling merch. One thing I love to see is even before we approved your application, you were out there selling merch, talking about your race. That's great. I believe that's at BriannaRandall.com [phonetic]. You can decide how you want to spell that and when the web browser doesn't bring you there, spell it a different way until you find the web page.

A Saillikeamother.com, it's easy.

Q Excuse me. So it's saillikeamother.com and you can go get all that. And if you want to read Brianna's writing, then you can go to BriannaRandall.com. So we will see you in June, and good luck.

A Thanks Jesse.

A Thanks Jesse.

Transcribed by Kelsey Fletcher