

# I GET SO CONFUSED ON LAND. IT'S ALL SO SIMPLE AT SEA

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**O**bstinacy should be one of the seven deadly sins. I've caused more harm to myself and others because of it than anything else – except perhaps acting on impulse. Right from when I was small, if someone said I shouldn't do something, I had to do it. It wasn't a conscious rebellion, it was like a strong drive. But now I'm trying hard to be more sensible and less obstinate.

I've become humbler, I know, partly because I'm less able to get my own way now than before, but also because on my solo voyage last year [in the smallest yacht ever sailed by a woman from Wales to New York] I faced death from starvation, from sharks and, worst of all, from thirst. I had only two gallons left at the end, and if you know you have the courage to face death, you can put life in a better perspective. I decided to do that trip really in order to look for something in myself, and the next journey I am doing will, I hope, help me re-create something I've lost from the past. I'm going to start my trek in a Welsh mining community in the north of Chile and I am taking them a present of a recording of a Welsh choir from home.

I respect money, but I have no love for it, and I wouldn't trade any diamonds or minks for this kind of adventure and experience. I feel so great, so good when I achieve things, even little things. But I know part of me will be thinking of my home in Wales and looking forward to seeing it again at Christmas.

There, I wake up restless and look at my watch. It's only four o'clock – a beautiful frosty night, the moon and stars are out and the sky is clear. Very quietly, so as not to wake Clive, I tiptoe downstairs. Immediately, my two dogs, Dillon the Villain (so called because he pulled the vicar's surplice off) and Bianca, jump up. Oh heck, it's great to see them again! They don't sleep in my bed any more because Clive's there now. I give them each a roll from last night's dinner and send them outside to leap around the gravestones (my cottage is next to the graveyard). Sometimes I like to run in the moonlight with them.

Then I put the kettle on for a cup of coffee. I know I have to think out the next chapter of my book on Chile, so I have an insane desire to do almost anything else.



Rosie Swale, 35, solo sailor and author, married Colin Swale at 19. They sailed round the world and had two children. When the marriage broke up, she spent four turbulent years with sex-change seaman Tracey Stamp. She lives in Wales with her boyfriend Clive, but has just set off on a 2500-mile trek in the Andes. Alison Coles spoke to her before she left. Photograph: Roger Scruton

I light the fire, check whether the water's hot. It's the only time I ever feel domesticated. Then I sit by the fire hugging my coffee and knowing that I have time ahead of me, the true currency of riches. I put a tape of classical music on because it helps me to write, and I try to do two new chapters of my book. It's not made any easier because my typewriter still has arthritis in its keys after coming across the Atlantic with me. It's a brilliant feeling when my writing goes right – the greatest adrenalin booster in the world and better than any orgasm.

After two and a half hours, I say goodbye to the dogs and sneak up to bed again for a cuddle with Clive, and it's lovely. Two delicious hours of sleep later, I roll over and say to Clive, 'I'd love some coffee'. Coffee in bed is my luxury and I love being spoiled. In some ways I feel like a cat because I love going out hunting and having adventures, but I love being treated nicely and spoiled. Kindness is the biggest turn-on of all for me. Eventually, after much mutual goading we get up at nine o'clock. I feel good. I let the dogs out again, give the fire a poke and do the washing up. Then Clive goes off to his own business for the morning.

Even though it's most expensive in the mornings, I do my phone calls at about a quarter past nine. I have no telephone in the house because I dislike being caught at a disadvantage with people ringing me up – so wearing two pairs of leg warmers, my anorak and track suit, I walk the quarter mile to the village. On the way, I work out what I'm going to say in advance. I go into the phone box, squat down and get quite comfy. With all the calls done, I take great delight in knowing that after many years of homelessness and insecurity, I have a place on this earth, and I walk

back to the safety of my home. I love Clive very, very much, but I still like my own company and I feel great because I have three hours before he comes back.

I might settle down and write till lunch or I might stop for bread and Marmite and – because I'm in a secure place – I might have a Guinness. I never drink when I'm not sure of my surroundings or if I'm sailing. Since my last voyage, I consciously appreciate all the very good things in my life and I sit there and value the peace and security. After four years with Tracey, all turbulent and troubled, peace is important. I was obsessed by her and I loved her but I'm not a lesbian. In fact it was partly her jealousy over my boyfriends which broke us up. I realise now that I was too innocent, I didn't take in how people were talking about us. I get so confused on land – it's all so simple at sea.

I value the love of my children, Eve, 15, and Jimmy, 13. They live with Colin and dot around all over the place, but they come to stay with me a lot. I love them and I like them and they've turned out wonderful human beings. Eve in particular understands that I shall always be a loner. She's a mature and lovely girl. I'm very lucky that they like doing the same things as I do when they come here – walking, picnicking, talking.

By the time Clive gets back at half past two, I'm as pleased to see him as if he'd been away three months. He always makes me a lovely lunch – normally a stew. Then from three to five I work again, although it's getting harder to be original. Sometimes I have Radio 4 on – I was in hospital recently and discovered it for the first time. It's so interesting and stimulating. We always talk a lot, too. I'm an inveterate chitterer and I learn a lot from Clive. He's 19 years older than

me – I've always liked older men because they can teach you – and I always want to improve.

When I was homeless, people were sweet to me and asked me to their houses, but it's not the same as your own home. Now I take a special delight in asking friends over occasionally in the evenings. We either just have a drink or a simple meal – I like meat and salads, good foods that leave you satisfied. If we're on our own, no friends over, we just talk. We're very close and he knows a lot about me, but I've learned not to have anyone who's a complete confidant because if you fall out they can take against you. My idea of heaven is to eat, then curl up by the fire in the arms of the man I love, listen to music and play with the dogs.

After we've cuddled and got comfy, and listened to some music, I go off and have a Tesco bubble bath at about 10. Then it's bed. In the past I've relished my notoriety and sexy image and I've had a great life because of it, but now I've reclaimed my body and only do what I want with it. Nobody's using me again. Sex is nice – and distinctly easier on land than at sea with the marmalade sliding off the shelf towards you – but sex for sex's sake doesn't appeal to me one bit. Sex and kindness is a good combination. Afterwards, as I'm drifting off to peaceful sleep, I think how truly lucky and happy I am now. I've never taken to the gin or heroin and still, after all my adventures, I have the love and respect of the people I love most of all.

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Next week: Anthony Khan Nixon, family man