



SAIL AWAY

A Dallas attorney sucks the marrow out of life.

INTERVIEW BY LINDSAY STAFFORD MADER

After trying college, Liza Farrow-Gillespie moved to Los Angeles to play at piano bars and work as a studio backup singer for some famous musicians. She eventually returned to Texas, married her high school sweetheart, and got an accounting degree. Then, two years into law school, she found out she had cancer.

Farrow-Gillespie went on to pass the bar exam, clerk for renowned U.S. District Court Judge Barefoot Sanders, and work as a litigation associate of a well-respected Dallas

firm. Still, despite being cancer free, she couldn't forget the truth of her own mortality. So she and her husband saved up to sail around the world for an initially undetermined length of time, which turned into a six-year adventure involving 50 countries, expansive solitude, and pirates.

Back in Dallas, Farrow-Gillespie is a co-founding managing partner in Farrow-Gillespie & Heath, is a member of the LCD Jazz Trio, and is publishing a book on her global sailing trip this year.

Liza Farrow-Gillespie fishing with her feet aboard the Heartsong III off the coast of Australia. Farrow-Gillespie and her husband took six years off to complete a 37,000-mile sailing circumnavigation with stops in more than four dozen countries.

You've had more adventures in your 61 years than most people could hope for. What is your perspective on living?

All I know about life is that none of us are getting out alive. We have so many little sayings—life is short, *carpe diem*, nobody says on his deathbed “I wish I had spent more time at the office,” eat dessert first, and so on—that the reality can get lost. Sometimes it takes a health scare, which was the case for me, to get past the clichés and to become a believer. For me, this means finding the joy in everything I do and giving everything I've got to every task and every person in my life, every day.

What is your most memorable experience?

Of course, the best day of my life was marrying my red-headed husband, but outside of that, singing backup vocals on the soundtrack for the film *Out of Africa*. I loved the book so much, and when we did the recording session with a 64-piece all-star orchestra, the music was truly amazing. And then the soundtrack won the Academy Award. It was a life highlight all the way around.

As to sailing, it would be being alone on watch during our Pacific crossing—3,000 miles of open ocean from the Galapagos to French Polynesia. Or it might be the pirate encounter off the coast of Somalia. Or it might be when we were nearly plowed under by a military convoy in the Gulf of Aden. Or it might be in the Adriatic when I was singing on deck and hit a high note and an entire pod of dolphins stuck their heads up simultaneously and looked at me like, “What the heck?”

My most memorable attorney experiences happened while I was clerking for the late Judge Barefoot Sanders. I still hear his voice in my head, usually saying, “Move it along, counselor.”

In L.A., you sang on commercials and in movies as well as back up for the Carpenters, Willie Nelson, and Joe Cocker. What do you like most about singing?

Singing is uplifting and satisfying. It's like Gatorade for a lawyer's thirsty analytical soul. The beauty of singing is that anyone can do it, and in my humble opinion, everyone should at every opportunity.



Liza Farrow-Gillespie aboard the Heartsong III in the Mid-Atlantic Ocean.

Your Dallas-based jazz trio includes two other attorneys. When hanging out together, do y'all talk law or music?

Both, but not much. It is such a happy happenstance when we all have time to play that we pretty much do nothing but play.

What five albums are you loving right now?

Here are the first five on my current playlist: Sam Smith's “In the Lonely Hour,” Stevie Wonder's “Songs in the Key of Life,” Annie Lennox's “Nostalgia,” Melody Gardot's “My One and Only Thrill,” and Herbie Hancock's “Head Hunters.”

In order to sail around the world, you and your husband saved for four years by cutting spending. Was it painful to change your lifestyle and was it worth it?

Yes and yes. We had to start over when we got back, but I look at it as having taken our retirement in the middle. I will happily work now until I drop.

You visited dozens of countries during your sailing adventure. Which was your favorite?

There were so many island countries in the South Pacific and Caribbean where we anchored in a beautiful bay with a perfect beach and turquoise water and never saw another soul. But I would have to say New Zealand was our favorite—in part because it was so difficult to get there (a week's passage from Tonga in gale-force winds), and in part because we were there for over a year and the people are as down-to-earth and hospitable as the scenery is unbelievably gorgeous.

How did the trip change you? I see just about everything differently now than I did before spending six years on a sailboat. It's too much to go into here, but come see me after work if you want to philosophize on perspective. Bring a nice shiraz.

How do you manage to merge your free spirit with the life of a lawyer?

A month or two ago, it hit me that the law firm Julie Heath and I have built [Farrow-Gillespie & Heath] is actually (knock on wood) successful. I get to go to work every day and practice law with a group of extraordinary individuals. That gives me great joy. **TBJ**