

Better Living

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**+ VOLUNTEER
LEND
A HAND
TO HOMELESS
FAMILIES**

**+ CHANGE
IS A GIVEN,
BUT HOW DO
YOU COPE
WITH IT?**

**+ FITNESS
AFTER 50:
YOU CAN DO
MORE THAN
YOU THINK**

On a mission

**COUPLE SETS SAIL TO
BRING SERENITY
INTO PEOPLE'S LIVES**

Jan and Tim Solomon bring the salvation of peace and comfort to those who sail with them

ON A MISSION

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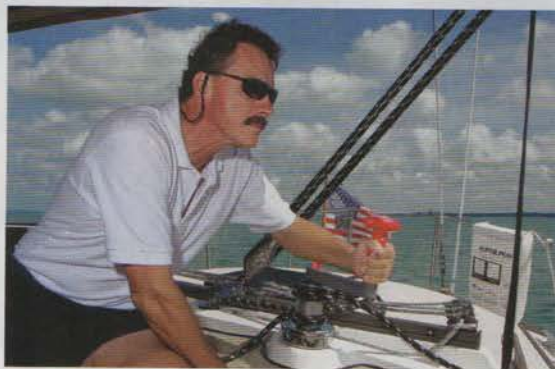
By **WALKER MEADE**, *Correspondent*
Photos by **CHRISTOPHER BUNN**

Janet Hamel Solomon has an imagination. A big one. As a young girl she invented invisible friends. When she wanted a horse and didn't get it, she told her young friend Tim that she had one.

"She said it was pastured far down at the end

of town where she wasn't allowed to go because she was only 5 years old. So I could never see it. Everybody believed her," Tim, now her husband, says.

Janet, called Jan, was almost 3 years old



Tim Solomon working the mainsail winch.

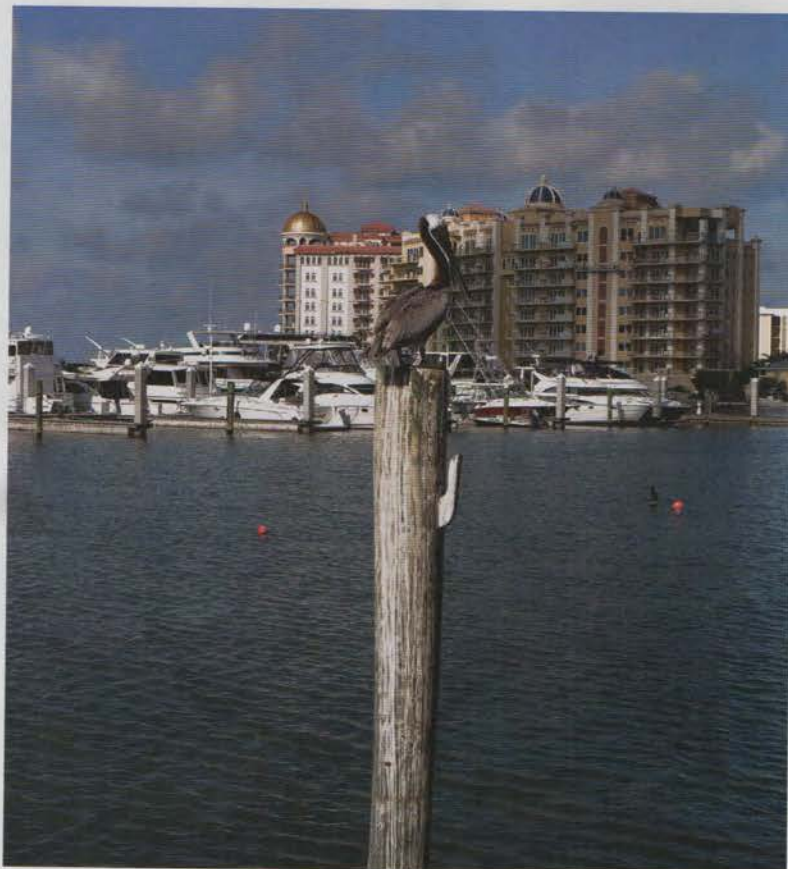
when she moved to Sarasota, the daughter of J.D. "Bud" Hamel, pastor of the First Brethren Church and chaplain to the city's police and fire departments, and Jean Hamel, a violinist for the Florida West Coast Symphony. Her parents believed in caring for people and lived that belief.





Above:
The Key Breeze is a 41-foot Morgan sailboat.

right:
The sailboat is docked at Marina Jack.



“Everybody was treated equally in our house. Sometimes I would wake up and there’d be a homeless man on our couch and that would be the day my dad was having lunch with the governor. But the good china did come out when the missionaries came,” she says.

Among those were the parents of Tim Solomon, who had gone to Argentina to do missionary work. When they returned to Sarasota with their son for a visit, Tim met Jan once again. He remembered their earlier encounter. She did not.

Jan was 16. Tim was 17. It took only five days for Tim to decide he wanted her to wait for him until he was able to finish high school in Argentina and return to the States permanently. She saw him again sooner than she expected.

“Tim’s father invited my father to come to Colombia to do mission work that summer and asked that I come along to play flute,” says Jan. She gave up the opportunity to go on a European tour with the National Band and went to Colombia instead. At the end of that



Tim captains the Key Breeze and Jan is the first mate.

visit, Tim's parents decided that he should finish high school in the United States.

That fall they went to Sarasota High together. They also took their first sailing course at the Sarasota Sailing Squadron. Jan and Tim graduated in 1975, married in 1977 and had two children. And when they were still quite young, their dream to change the world led them back to Bogota, Colombia, to serve as missionaries with the First Brethren church, the tiny nondenominational church in Sarasota.

And then, Jan says, a dreadful thing happened.

"The situation during the time we

lived in Colombia has improved, but in 1989, the week of the assassination of presidential candidate Juan Carlos Galan, Americans were told to keep a low profile, but I was playing flute in the soccer stadium for a Luis Palau Festival. I stopped at a hot dog stand each day for a soda, and this time my drink had been drugged," she says. "I have been told that I became unconscious before bouncing directly on the sidewalk, three times, on my face and neck."

It was a foiled kidnap attempt, she says. She was not abducted, but was seriously injured. The orchestra director drove her home to her husband. Jan did not





wake up completely for three days, she says. After tests at the hospital, "I was told how blessed I was to be alive, even though today I still struggle with the effects of chemical poisoning and trigeminal neuralgia."

The Solomons lived in Colombia for two more years.

"I have continued with short-term mission trips and book projects," Jan says. She is listed as an author of the book "Impact Eternity," published by Youth With A Mission, Y.W.A.M. Publishing, and has completed a draft of "Sailing Home, You CAN Go Home Again." Jan believes that "each experience in life can become a stepping stone to the future," she says, "if we don't let ourselves become defined by our past, but use it to learn and to grow."

In the years after the terrible event in Colombia, Jan traveled to Siberia on an educational trip.

"I went without my family for three weeks. We've done many missions since then, mostly with groups that need technological help. We went to Ecuador to work with the native Waodani tribe, who had once been violent but are peace-



Bryon and Alyssa Hutson take the helm of the Key Breeze.

ful now. In the Dominican Republic, we helped build a clinic. We do what is needed."

Jan and Tim returned home in 1999 and since 2007 have embarked on a

different kind of mission. They bought a 41-foot Morgan sailboat and purchased Key Sailing from former owners Tom and Sally Reed. Tim is the captain, and Jan is the first mate.

"Tim and I used to say when we were young that we were going to go out in the world, end war and poverty and then come home and buy a boat," says Jan.

They take six people out on the Key Breeze at a time, unless it's a private charter, and, according to their website, offer people "Fresh air, fine chocolates and a few hours of peace on earth."

Passengers Karen Valentine and her husband, Mike, of Sarasota have experienced the bliss that comes with being out on the water.

"Mike and I love the beautiful waters of Sarasota Bay, basking in the sun on the Key Breeze while enjoying the peace and quiet that sailing provides," says Karen. "Jan and Tim are respectful and professional. If you want to visit, they are wonderful hosts. If they sense you prefer quiet time, they retreat into the background."

Jan figures they have taken more than 12,000 guests out on the Key Breeze and logged more than 25,000 miles. She has begun writing a book titled "25,000 Miles From Home" to share some of the inspiring stories of their passengers.

"Guests of our boat have survived everything from cancer to 9-11," says Jan. "Their inspiring lives challenge me daily to ... do more than just breathe in and out ... Let's die living!"

The Key Breeze is also an official educational vessel of Sarasota County, which gives Jan a platform to share her message with sailing students.

"As a hometown girl (since 1960) who served in over 30 countries on every continent but Antarctica, I recognize that I have a special responsibility to communicate the values that shaped my childhood to the next generation," she says. "My mother used to say that no one of us can do everything, but if each of us does something, we can make a difference. She also used to tell me that it was noble to want to go off and change the world, but if I waited long enough, just about everyone on the planet would step onto our crystal white sand. And she was right!"

"The world has come to us. I remember one January 1st where we had four charters on New Year's Day, and the guests were from four different continents. I feel so blessed to have seen the world and to have lived long enough to see it come home to me!"



Interested?

Key Sailing, winner of the 2012 Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce Small Business Award for International Business of the Year
Key Breeze sails from Slip E-18
Marina Jack, 2 Marina Plaza,
Sarasota, FL 34236
(941) 346-SAIL(7245), keysailing@comcast.net, www.siestakeysailing.com

Now the Solomons have opened the Key Breeze to guests from organizations like Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Wounded Warrior Project.

"These brave sailors come on the boat with long bucket lists of things they still want to accomplish," she says. "They are just amazing and have given so much to our country."

As we finish our interview in the salon of the Key Breeze, Tim is on deck getting ready to officiate in a church service. He looks very much the sea captain as he asks us to go ashore so he can secure the yacht. Jan looks at him as though they had just fallen in love that very morning. Then she turns to me and says, "Tim and I graduated from Sarasota High School together, even though we grew up on different sides of the equator. Now we are back in town ... and we are here to give back."