

# POWER & MOTOR YACHT

## REMEMBERING JIMMY BUFFETT

HIS LONGTIME CAPTAIN REFLECTS  
ON THEIR ADVENTURES TOGETHER

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# THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES, MR. BUFFETT.



**M**usic and boating. A combination so powerful, so intertwined that it's hard to imagine one without the other. And no musician embodied or captured the spirit of being on the water like the late James William Buffett. The son of a son of a sailor, Jimmy was the genuine article, someone who looked to the water to escape the world and find himself, whether that was in the surf, under sail or chasing the bite.

His music, a one-of-a-kind mix of rock, reggae and country captivated millions around the world and earned him a rabid, cross-genre fan base the world over. I believe the reason for that is, for many of us, his music marked time. It's so strongly associated with chapters in our lives. Whenever I hear "Margaritaville," "It's Five O'clock Somewhere," "One Particular Harbor" or "Bama Breeze," I'm transformed back into a sunburned teenager, experiencing the Bahamas for the

first time with my family. And when I hear "Son of a Son of a Sailor," I think back to playing that song to the point of abuse as Karen and I restored and learned to sail our first boat in our early 20s. The time-traveling power those songs possess is as potent as any picture I have.

When Jimmy passed away in September, the world mourned; but it was the outpouring of love for the lifelong waterman that really resonated with me. On social media, it seemed that everyone I know who enjoys boating shared a memory of a concert they went to, or a song or lyric that touched their heart. The memories people shared felt extremely personal. For once, boaters of all creeds, race, religion or political affiliation all agreed on one thing: The world was a quieter place without Jimmy.

After learning of his passing, I reached out to two people who knew him personally. The first was Senior Editor Chris Dixon who worked for Jimmy for a number of years and who formed a friendship that he cherishes to this day. I also reached out to his long-time-captain Vinnie LaSorsa who the magazine worked with under much happier circumstances when we featured the Freeman/Merritt catamaran that he helped bring to life for Buffett.

I tried my best to convey a kind word or two to the captain whose world was just turned upside down. It would take months of healing, but LaSorsa ultimately decided he wanted to work with us to tell the story of his friend and mentor. He told me, "All over the Internet, there's people saying what a nice, great guy he was, I want everyone to know that they're more right than they will ever know."

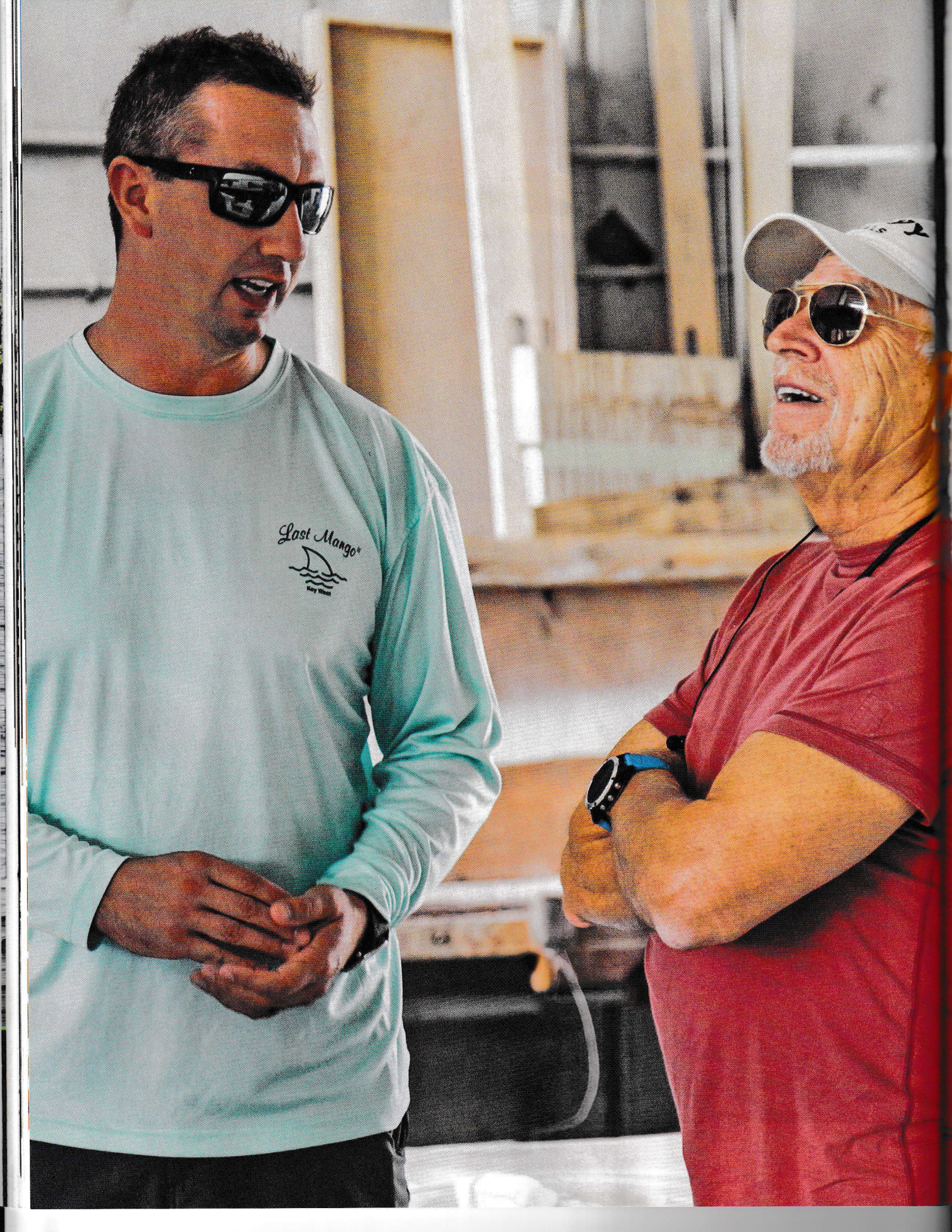
Living with his wife and two kids in Buffett's guest house in Sag Harbor, I sat down with Vinnie at the kitchen table. Now 41, Vinnie finds himself at a channel marker of life. His boss and friend of 19 years is gone; he's still working for the Buffett family, but his future is shrouded in a dense fog. Since his improbable path to becoming a captain for Buffett at just 23 years old until the musician's passing, Vinnie's life has been equal parts rich and rewarding, filled with the kind of adventure and chaos that you only see in the movies. He also got to know Buffett like few others, he was with him on his best days cruising through paradise when he felt on top of the world, and when, near the end, he would look off into the water and reflect on his life and mortality. I'm thankful to Vinnie for sharing those memories, which can be found in the story "The Captain and the Kid."


When I think of Jimmy Buffett, the wake he left in this world and the music that will endure for generations, I can't help but think of the quote, "heroes get remembered, but legends never die."

Thanks for the memories, Jimmy. Fins Up. ☐

*See you on the water,*  
Dan  
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*Last Mango*  
Key West





FOR MOST OF HIS ADULT LIFE **CAPT. VINNIE LASORSA** HAS KNOWN ONLY ONE JOB, THAT OF BOAT CAPTAIN TO LEGENDARY WATERMAN AND MUSICIAN **JIMMY BUFFETT**. HIS STORY OF WORKING FOR A BOSS-TURNED-FRIEND SHINES A LIGHT ON THE LATE ARTIST'S PERSONAL TIME AFLOAT—AND WHAT A REMARKABLE PERSON HE REALLY WAS.

AS TOLD TO **DANIEL HARDING JR.**

# THE CAPTAIN AND THE KID

## **ON BECOMING A CAPTAIN FOR A MUSICAL PIRATE**

I was working at a dive shop one summer and while I'm doing that, I was also a fishing machine. I meet this captain at the tackle shop one day and he asks if I want to go out with them. He said, 'You can come out, but you just got to wash the boat when you get in.' That's how it started. I would go out with them, and I'd wash the boat and then it turned into the kind of a thing where the other captains saw that I could actually wash the boat.

Then I decided, I'll get my captain's license because a few of my friends were doing that, so I got my captain's license at 19.

After that, I ended up joining a charter boat that went to the Merritt boatyard so it could have some work done. I kept going in and out of the parts room, which is right next to Roy Merritt's office. I remember I was fixing the latch on a tuna door. I was doing this and that and they were like 'Hey, what are you doing? Are you rebuilding the boat?' And I just said, 'There's a lot of things wrong with it.' So, Roy one day takes me aside and he said, 'you're pretty ambitious.' And I replied, 'Yeah, I try to be, but I just don't want that door to fall off.' That's the OCD part of me, I can't ever see something wrong without attempting to fix it. Roy then told me, 'A little ambition goes a long way.' And then I walk away from him, and some guy comes up to me and says, 'Hey do you want to help clean this engine room?'

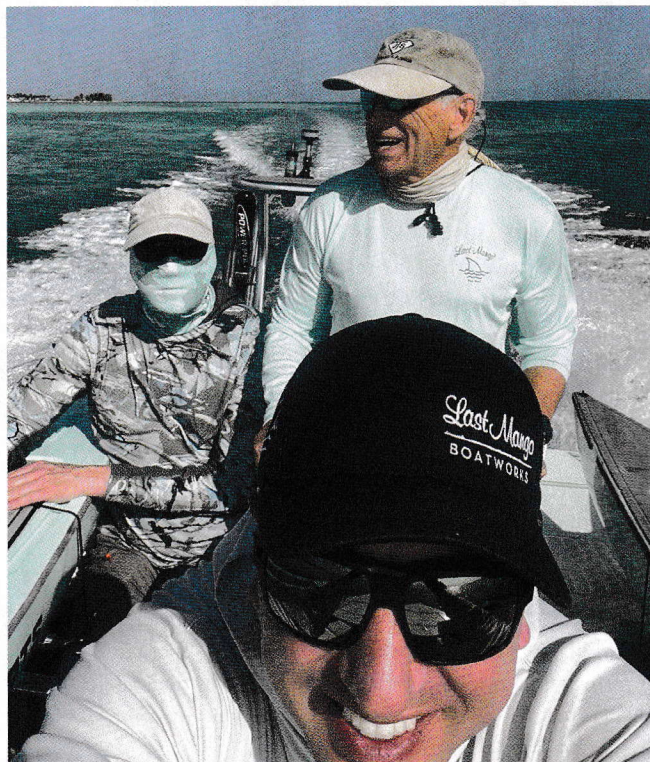
Around this time, I met the crew for Rick Hendricks and they end up taking me through my Christmas break from college to Puerto Rico. And the funny thing about this is they tell me we're going to Puerto Rico and Jimmy Johnson is going to use the boat. I think they're talking about the football coach, right? I had no idea who this young guy was that climbed on the boat with a good-looking young woman. But it was the future NASCAR star and his wife on their honeymoon trip, I had the wrong Jimmy Johnson in mind.

Then what happens is, when you start working for the celebrity circle it's so much easier to stay in the circle because all the jobs are word of mouth. I ended up working on this one boat called *Breck Girl* because it belonged to the Breck Shampoo family. Then there was the Ken's dressings guy. Not that they're celebrities, but they're big names, you know? And then I went back to work for Hendricks.

And through this process, I get a call from John Brownlee (I was close friends with his son, Ben) who said that Jimmy Buffett's fleet captain, Spider, was asking about me. He said he got your name from Roy Merritt.

So, I got a call for the interview. Spider interviewed five people and the next youngest guy was in his early forties. At this point I'm turning 23 and I didn't think I'd get the job because when you see all these qualified guys with 20 years' experience and what the job was—being the captain of Jimmy's fishing boat. I didn't think I had a chance.

But I met with Spider and Jimmy's Tour Manager, Mike, at Jimmy's office. And he had one of those offices that was super intimidating; there was a huge desk, Emmy Awards and Oscars and all this crazy stuff you see in the movies. Mike asked me a few things about what



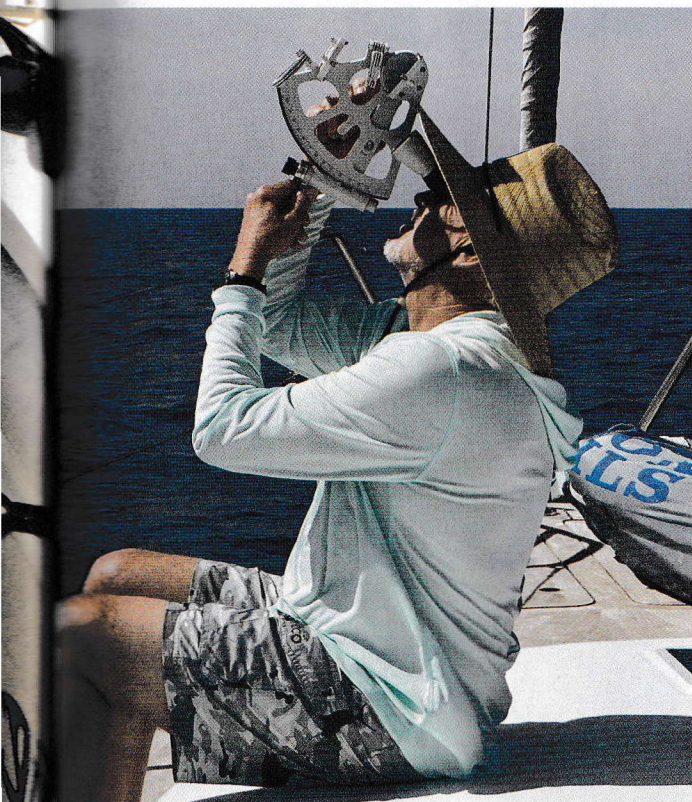
ALL PHOTOS PROPERTY OF LAST MANGO BOATWORKS

*Vinnie's mate takes in Last Mango as she rests in Montauk. Left: Vinnie and Jimmy on the hunt for bonefish in the Bahamas.*





*Jimmy and Vinnie celebrating a giant tuna in 2013 off Nantucket. Right: Last Mango off Montauk. Bottom: Not many people can celestially navigate, Jimmy was one of them.*



I've done and what I thought the job would be like, where I grew up and things like that. And then he asked, 'Have you ever been to a Jimmy Buffett concert?' I said no but my younger brother had a couple of times. Then he asked how many Jimmy Buffett songs I knew, and I said two. He looks at me and I say, no, no, no, three! "Cheesburger in Paradise" ... "Margaritaville" and "A Pirate Looks at 40."

And he's like, 'You only know *three* songs?' And he says, 'What else do you know about Jimmy Buffett?' I said, I know he's a Caribbean rock singer. And I said, I know he likes fishing and loves his boats. He replied, 'That's all you know about Jimmy Buffett?'

And then in my head, I'm like damn, I should have done research. I'm done. My face was probably red as hell. I just wasn't expecting questions about him. Another week and a half or two weeks goes by ... nothing. Then Spider calls me and he's like, hey, why don't you meet me at the boat? He asked, 'Can you be here this afternoon?' And I was like, yeah, I'll be there. So later I'm sitting on the bulkhead behind the dock talking with Spider. But something was super off. He kept looking at his watch and I knew that he was not present with me.

Then he gets a call on his cell phone and it's so funny, the timing of this. Spider had a Motorola Razzr, and that was a big deal back then. I realized he was talking to Jimmy and that he was about to arrive.

So, Jimmy walks up. Spider introduces the two of us and then walks 100 feet away to talk to some of the workers. I talked to Jimmy for maybe five minutes about boats and a few people that we both knew. Then he said, 'I'm thinking about going out on my jet ski tomorrow.' And then he said, 'Alright, I'll see you tomorrow.' And he walked away. Spider comes back. It's funny because he asks, 'How did that go?' I told him he said, see you tomorrow. Then he says, 'Congratulations!'

It was the craziest experience, especially that first week of being around Jimmy. He said things to me like 'Don't be nervous, don't be nervous.' He kept telling me that the first probably dozen times I was around him. He would say things like, 'Hey, I put my pants on the same way you do, alright?' Finally, we got past that, but it probably took a month.

But he said something early on that I'll never forget, he said, 'You're going to be here for two weeks or the rest of your life, I guess we'll find out in two weeks,' which was intimidating as heck at the time. Now, I appreciate it so much.

#### TURNING A JOB INTO A CAREER

So, my first year I was super nervous, I was told to be very discreet and not tell people who you're working for. I was *overly* discreet.

Anyone who walked down the dock and saw his boat would try to talk to me. I remember just acting like I couldn't hear people. I wasn't trying to be rude, but I would pretend I couldn't hear them. I was so scared to talk to anybody because I didn't want to accidentally leak something. I spent my first year being extremely nervous. The amount of attention I got was crazy, people were coming out of the woodwork.

People would be really nice to you but there was always an angle; I was very naive in the beginning, and I would always catch the angle on the backside. People were trying to either find out where Jimmy was because they wanted to sell him something. Or, they wanted to give him something. They wanted him to sign something. They want-





*Fishing with man's best friend(s), his Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. Right: Out for a glorious paddle off Cat Cay.*

ed tickets. They wanted him to meet somebody. They wanted him to say 'hi' to somebody. Or they want him to come to their marina. One time, for example, this guy gives me a card and says, 'You know, you can come by and get all the free ice you want when you're going fishing,' and at the time you think that's super cool. I go over there to get free ice, well, now he takes a picture of the boat coming to his fuel dock and he put it all over the Internet.

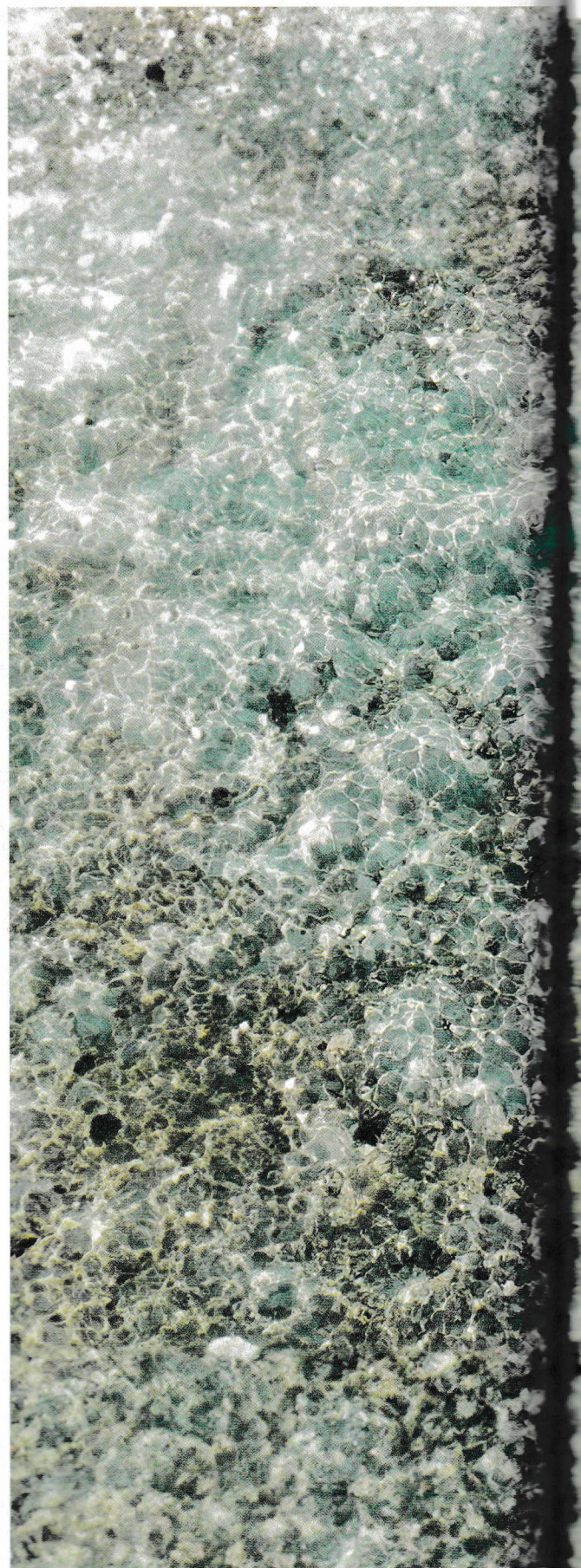
I had to get used to protecting Jimmy because coming to the boat was his getaway, trying to protect him from fans sure, but more importantly from the owners of the marina or the other boat owners on the dock who would say things like, 'I got this property Jimmy would love to buy.' I couldn't believe how many people were trying to sell him something or get him to invest in something. Thousands of people tried to get through me to pitch him something.

I ended up getting really good at politely getting out of those situations. For example, people would see me and say, 'Where's Jimmy?' And I'd say, 'Your guess is as good as mine.' That was my way of deflecting but being polite.

### **SETTLING IN**

It wasn't until probably year three or four where I really settled down and wasn't super nervous when he showed up and we started to exchange fist bumps and half hugs, and he would ask how I was doing. By year three or four, I realized we were becoming friends.

That's when he started to have me do research for him. He might hear about a new MFD and ask me to look into it so we could talk about it. Then I started to get invites to go surfing because he knew I liked







to surf. But this happened over a period of time; it was pretty organic.

My role changed a lot over the years. I was doing everything from walking his dogs and flying drones for video b-roll to helping him design a paddleboard. Then we designed the 42 Freeman/Merritt along with other boats. I also did a few trips on his sailboat.

I ended up becoming the fleet captain when my old boss Spider retired. That was a pretty easy transition because of how long and closely I worked with Spider.

Over our 18 years of fishing together, Jimmy and I averaged 36 days per year. There were a few years we had 28 days. That might not sound like a lot to most people, but those are only the days where we left the dock and fished. He came to the boat a lot and we just sat on the boat. We always tried to do a few one-week-trips per year. But there were also times he'd fly in for two nights, three nights max and go tuna fishing. A lot of times he'd come to the boat between two legs of a show, like if he had a show in Boston, if you go from Boston to Nantucket and then his next show might be at Jones Beach or in New Jersey.

I have a lot of captain friends who, they see their owners two or three times (or even days) a year. And if they're big chunks, it's much easier because you can plan for that. For me, in my bedroom right now I still have my backpack packed. Literally, it's open. I got my Yeti backpack and my Yeti duffle bag. I'm still so used to that because I wouldn't get much more than 24-hour's notice before a trip sometimes.

#### **I GOTTA STOP WISHIN', I GOTTA GO FISHIN'**

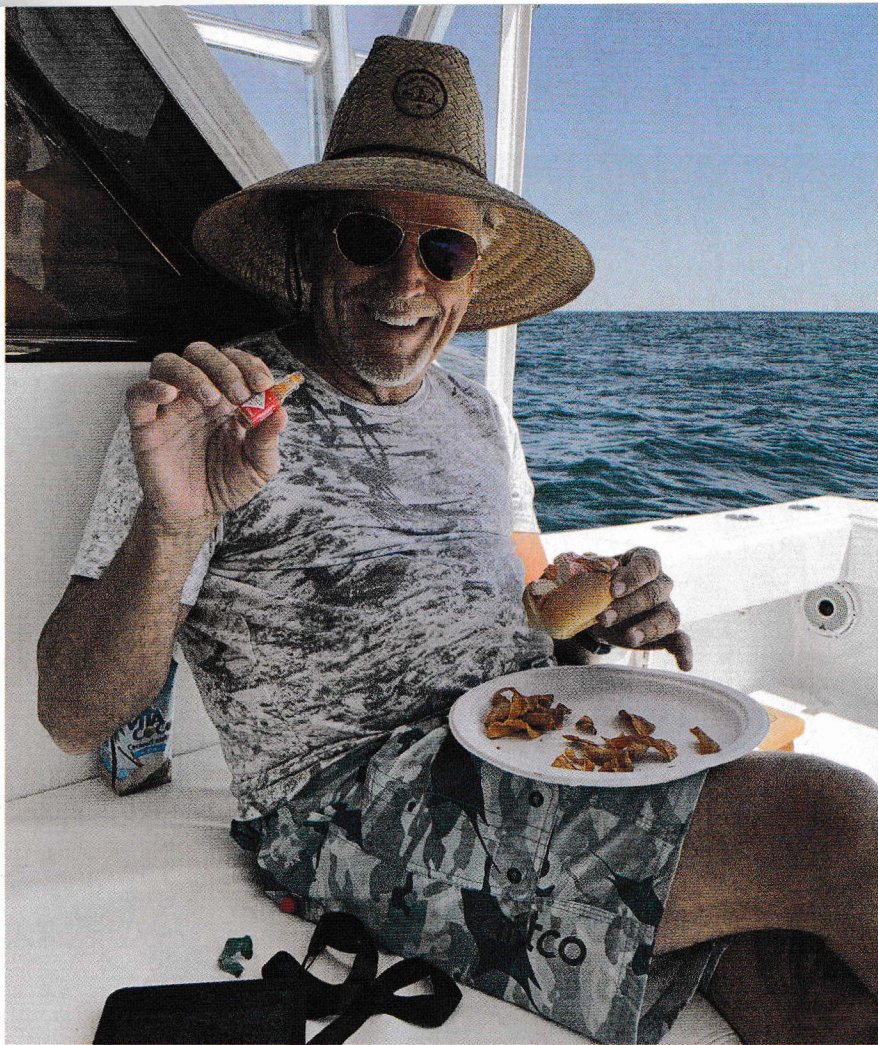
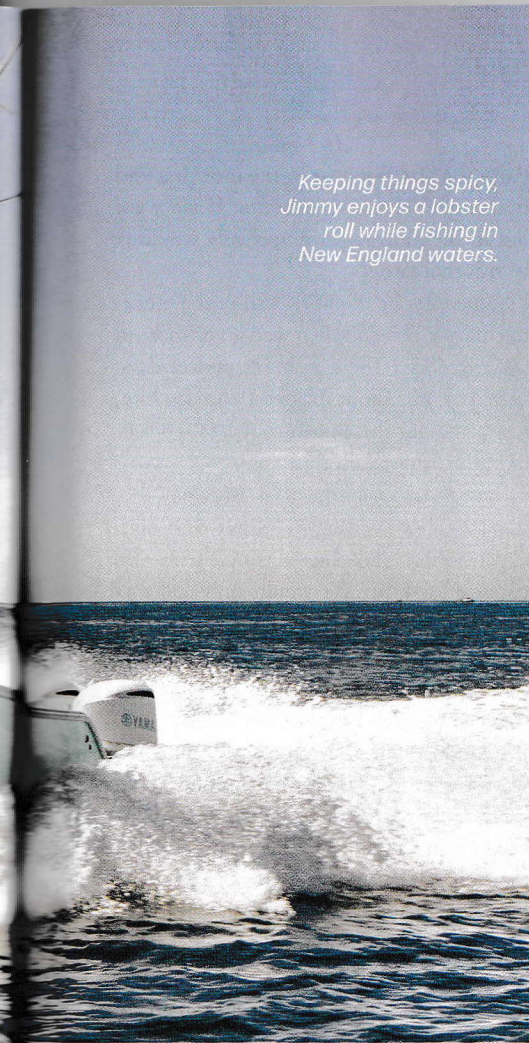
Jimmy had to be on all the time; everyone's trying to get a moment with him. So, getting out on the water was his way to get away from that. Probably 80-percent of the time he got on the boat, he wanted to drive—he wanted to run the boat. And from 2005 to 2013, I didn't have a full-time mate, so I'd fish with him, just him and me or him, me and his friends.

I'd run around and handle the lines and I'd put out all the fishing stuff. He would run the boat while we were fishing. I have a lot of days where it was only him and me. But in 2013, I started to realize I could offer him a better experience if I had a mate with me. With a mate I could spend more time helping and doing things like making a really nice lunch. Now, I could grill some burgers or something whereas if I didn't have a mate and I was in the cockpit and fishing was crazy, I was throwing together a turkey and cheese sandwich—which was fine—he didn't care. But I wanted to make his experience so much better.

So, yeah, the boat allowed him to turn it off. He was able to do that even more once I had the mate because now, he didn't have to drive as much, because I was in the cockpit the whole time. Now he could find a comfortable corner of the boat and be on his iPad. He would write pages of his books from the boat. He would write down song lyrics. He would edit song lyrics on the iPad.

He sometimes would come down to the boat and say, 'Capt. Vinn,

*Keeping things spicy, Jimmy enjoys a lobster roll while fishing in New England waters.*



I want to relax. I'm not going to be Jimmy Buffett for a little bit.' That was his line: 'I'm not going to be Jimmy Buffett for a little bit.'

And he would just crash out, take a nap. Some days he needed that. And some days you could tell he had a hard time turning it off and that he had to keep busy. He'd be driving the whole time, messing with the radar. Sometimes he liked listening to music and listened to it loud. But he really loved the silence; he loved just hearing the water lapping against the hull and taking a nap.

#### **THE ONE THAT DIDN'T GET AWAY**

This might not be the absolute best time on the water ... but then again, maybe it was. The last time we went serious fishing was September 6th of 2022.

Jimmy always wanted to catch a thousand pounder. Any time we wanted to go find them at Georges Bank, it was the fall and the weather never really cooperated because it's a big hundred mile run from Nantucket. Between tour dates and weather, we never got there until September 6th.

On that day we go out, I remember he was taking videos that morning. It was a little rushed but he kept saying, 'I'm glad we came.' He would always say, 'If you don't go, you don't know.' And then ten minutes after, the rod goes off and we hook into a huge, giant Bluefin tuna. I'm pretty confident it was a 1,000-pounder.

We got some great underwater footage of the thing coming up.

And he was freaking out. I mean, it's tough when you release the fish to know for sure that it weighed over 1,000. I don't know, maybe he was 940, maybe he was 1,040. But I'll tell you, it was around 115 inches so you can kind of estimate; either way it was the biggest tuna we ever caught. He was high fiving and yelling. He immediately wanted to pull the SD card out of the cameras to watch the footage. I remember he was replaying it in slow motion and saying, 'I think we got it, I think we got it. I think that was a thousand pounder.'

Bluefin—I think he realized it's the one species where things could really go the other way if the fish wanted it to, because we've seen them do it. I think once you see the power they have, you have so much respect for them.

He was also really big on carefully releasing Bluefin. We fished with 60-pounds of drag to catch them quick. We would try to catch them in less than an hour because after that hour mark, their chance of dying increases dramatically. We always did our best to catch them as fast as we could.

Really, Jimmy was very much into gentleman fishing. I would tell you, he loved fishing for giants. He absolutely loved it. It was the only type of fishing that he would really spend literally all day and get up at three or four or five in the morning to go do.

But every other kind of fishing other than giant tuna fishing was a half day, if that. Like sail fishing was a half day event; we used to



go in the afternoon or in the morning and it was gentleman style hours. If we went out in the morning, we normally wouldn't be out that late.

Sometimes he might fly fish in the morning, have lunch and then we'd go offshore in the afternoon. Those were his perfect days, because it was about the experience for him; just being out there for him was 90-percent of it, the fish was always a bonus.

Jimmy was a very practical fisherman too. It wasn't about getting to a limit with him. Catching and keeping a couple fish was enough for him. We would only kill one Bluefin a summer. He was big on not taking more than what you and your family could eat. He wasn't like that kind of fisherman that had to catch fish until the bite stopped. He would catch a few and say, 'Man, that was awesome, let's try for bonefish now.'

He really was a conservationist. He didn't believe that recreational fishermen should kill more than they could consume or give away to their close friends. He would always say to me, 'If you got to freeze all the fish and let it get freezer burn and throw it away in six months then what's the point? He'd use it as an excuse to get back out there and go catch more.'

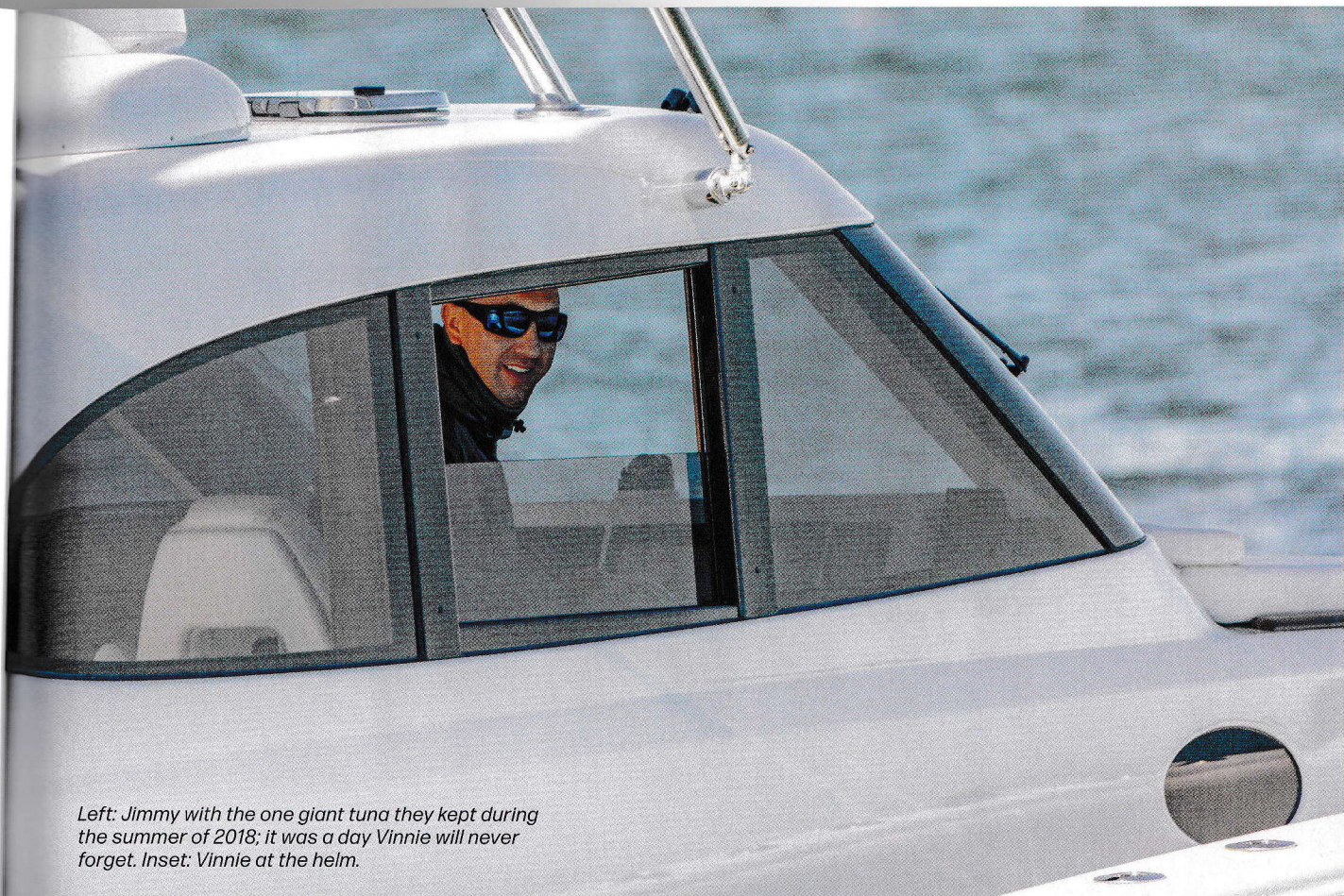
#### CATCH AND RELEASE

Releasing fish became an even much bigger priority after his Merkel Cell diagnosis. Do you know the song "Slack Tide" that he wrote after his diagnosis?

*I've got a fish on the line  
But there won't be a feast  
We've got too much in common  
And he shall be released  
I've seen day turn to night  
And watched the changin' of seasons  
Things don't just happen  
They happen for a reason*

#### ON THE LEGACY HE'D WANT TO LEAVE HIS FELLOW BOATERS

I think he would say how important it is to teach kids to love the outdoors and the water. And to respect and honor the fish you kill by eating it and sharing it with your family and friends. He didn't really judge people who stocked their freezers full. He had a lot of friends that did that. He respected if that was your choice as long as you were staying within the legal limits. But he was always big on leaving some for the next guy.



Left: Jimmy with the one giant tuna they kept during the summer of 2018; it was a day Vinnie will never forget. Inset: Vinnie at the helm.

He was also very big on allowing his friends and family to use the boat, especially if he knew something was going on, like if he knew the whales were in close, he would encourage his friends and family to come out with me. Or he'd say, 'The tuna fishing has been good and there's a bunch of whales. If you guys are free, you should go out there and look.' And he would tell them to call me and schedule it. That was especially true if someone he knew had a son or daughter that was really into fishing, he would say, 'You need to call my captain and go out on my boat.' I have dozens of examples of when that happened.

#### WHAT VINNIE WANTS YOU TO KNOW ABOUT JIMMY

If you look at any of the Jimmy fan forums, people write these things about what an incredible person he was. I read these things and think about how he was even more incredible than anyone ever knew. They're seeing the side of him that he puts out there. They don't see what a good dad he was, how much he loved his kids. He took care of his family. He took care of his employees. He believed in giving women opportunities and putting women in positions of power.

#### TRYING TO REASON WITH HURRICANE SEASON

He ended his career in Key West by singing "Tin Cup Chalice." You know the lyrics?

*And I wanna be there  
I wanna go back down and die beside the sea there  
With a tin cup for a chalice, fill it up with good red wine  
And I'm a chewin' on a honeysuckle vine*

He made it to September 1st. Until the very end, he never was sad. He was making jokes. It's crazy how positive he was; he exceeded every doctor's expectation and never talked about dying at all.

He would say things that alluded to it and you knew what he meant. He said to me while we were looking at pictures of a 56 Merritt we're building: 'Man, the kids are going to love that.'

During his last days he called a few of us in to see him. And I remember there's a few people from his band that were at the house, and they were so sad after visiting Jimmy.

His personal assistant Darin tells me before I go in to see him, he goes, 'Can you do something for me? Make him happy.' I go in, he's got his iPad in front of him.

I walk in and start talking about the weather and that we should go fishing. And I'm just talking. And he's like 'Yeah, yeah, we're going to do that. We're going to do that.'

This was only a couple days before he passed and the people in the room prior to me were saying things like, 'Thanks for everything. You're the best.' They were saying goodbye.

So I talk to him for 25 minutes. He's acknowledging me. And at the end I was like, 'Alright, let me know how the weather looks. Keep an eye on it later and I'll see you tomorrow.' He looks at me and slowly raises his fist. I give him a fist bump just like I had thousands of times before and said, 'I'll see you tomorrow.'

And as I'm walking out, his eyes followed me, and I kept a huge smile on my face. That's the last thing I ever said to him. □