



# Sailing the High Seas

Steve and Doris Colgate on their maritime adventures and the 50th anniversary of the Offshore Sailing School.

by Mi Mi Chloe Park

Steve Colgate sailing *Nirvana* in front of Sydney harbor during the Hobart Race of 1980





It takes a certain character to become a sailor. Aside from the physical toll, there is a mental resilience required, and seasoned sailors will often remark that deep discipline and respect of the high seas is necessary to succeed. Hemingway said, “Man is never lost at sea,” and Steve Colgate is one such man. His interests led him to charter a course far more adventurous than he could have ever imagined.

Since its inception 50 years ago, the Offshore Sailing School has become America’s foremost sailing academy. With his wife of 46 years, Doris, the pair own and operate facilities in New York, South Florida and the Caribbean. Growing up, Steve had no interest in running an empire like the one his ancestor William Colgate started in the 19th century. As Doris remembers it, “His godmother was a Tiffany, and she kept telling him to get a real job and get into the stock market and what the others [in his family] were doing. But it was something he’d said over and over again that he just didn’t want to do.”

It was quite a legacy. In 1806 William Colgate created the William Colgate Company in New York. An English manufacturer from Kent, he immigrated to the United States and opened a starch, soap and candle factory on Dutch Street in downtown Manhattan.

By the early 20th century, William Colgate’s descendants would incorporate the brand, and by 1911 more than two million tubes of Colgate toothpaste would be distributed worldwide. By 1926 competing companies Palmolive and Peet merged to become Palmolive-Peet Company, and two years later in a heated corporate takeover Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company was formed.

Steve remembers how corporate anxieties loomed over his childhood. In the 1920s Colgate’s father, Gilbert, who was on the board, sold all his stock in the Palmolive-Peet takeover: he did not want anything more to do with the company.

Steve remembers, “I was born in 1935, and it wasn’t until the ’50s that I could have



**Above:** Steve and Doris’ wedding in 1969  
**Opposite page above:** Steve and Doris Colgate leading Offshore Sailing’s Flotilla in Maine, 1972.  
**Right:** Steve on *Seal* rounding Cape Horn



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Colgate toothpaste at home, but we obviously had great advantages. My great-great—I don’t know how many ‘greats’—grandfather founded it, and that’s who we looked toward.” In 1953 Peet was dropped from the name of the brand, making it Colgate-Palmolive to this day. The company is now valued at \$59.02 billion dollars and is ranked number 64 among the World’s Most Valued Brands, according to *Forbes*. The name Colgate remains as part of the brand’s heritage, as well as Colgate University.

His family’s past wealth does not haunt him; it is clear that Steve’s aspirations for the high seas far exceeded any ambitions in the board-

room. Steve had the best education America had to offer, and he matriculated at the Buckley School in New York, Saint Paul’s in New Hampshire and Yale. Life on the high seas began when Steve was nineteen years old, when his mother suggested a trip to Havana, Cuba, for a transatlantic yacht race aboard the *Mare Nostrum*, to San Sebastián, Spain. When Colgate proved his worth, the yacht’s owner, Spanish millionaire Enrique Urrutia, invited him to crew on his next journey: the Fastnet Race from Cowes to Plymouth, England. From then on, Steve was a proven sailor, competing worldwide in the Pan American Games; the 1968 Olympics in Acapulco, Mexico, and the America’s Cup trials, where he competed against Ted Turner. In 1979, years after his first experience, Colgate revisited and won the disastrous Fastnet Race that took the lives of fifteen other sailors in its torrential storms. His precautionary methods in the race would become standard protocol for sailors in similar situations to this day. Including enforcing the use of safety tethers, to prevent crew members from being flung overboard.

Creating the sailing school, according to Steve, was “so peaceful, athletic, it was cerebral, competitive, the people: it just had everything.” He would then go on to pen books such as *Fundamentals of Sailing*, *Cruising and Racing*, and this textbook remains a critical learning tool



in the curriculum for certification from the National Academy of Sailing.

Colgate met his wife, Doris, in 1968, while she was working for a yachting magazine and assigned to cover his Offshore Sailing School's racing course in the Bahamas. Over the Bahamian sunset they fell in love.

Originally from Bethesda, Maryland, Doris was the daughter of a biochemist who was also on the board of the National Institutes of Health. He pressed upon her the importance of philanthropy, and as a result became involved with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, the American Heart Association and the Leukemia Cup Regatta, which has raised more than \$50 million to date. She paved a trail in the predominantly male sport of sailing and founded the National Women's Sailing Association in 1990. In 1991 she started a mentoring program for at-risk girls called AdventureSail, and in 1997 the not-for-profit Women's Sailing Foundation.

Together this married couple of 46 years speak fondly of journeys to the Great Barrier Islands, Greece, the French Riviera and Cape Horn and reminisce about places as remote as Tonga in the South Pacific. On their next trip they hope to venture down south for a trip through the Panama Canal.

These days the Offshore Sailing School offers various courses for all types of sailors, from novice to advanced, including a Fast Track to Cruising course, which offers the fastest way to achieve skills and certifications within one week. There are additional courses offered called Live Aboard, where the participant experiences the fun of living on board a boat that cruises between ports in Florida to the British Virgin Islands. Corporate trips are also a popular option, and schools such as Emory and Wharton have included the Offshore Sailing School's courses into their MBA programs.

For the 50th anniversary of the Offshore Sailing School, Steve and Doris aim to grow their business with continued partnerships with luxury resorts. Although primarily based in Fort Myers, Florida, their presence in the Caribbean has been unrivaled since 1973. They are now looking into the world of chartering, catering custom and private adventures for clientele. Undoubtedly the future for Offshore Sailing School will stretch across the oceans' horizons for many years to come. ♦

On the *Captiva*, 1976

The Offshore Sailing Center in New York, 1982



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**Above:** Students learn to sail aboard a boat co-designed by Steve Colgate **Middle right:** King Olav of Norway aboard *Nirvana* with owner Marvin Green and Steve Colgate **Right:** Doris Colgate in 1970 at the 12-meter America's Cup Trials **Bottom:** Sailing in front of the Statue of Liberty

