



# Wayward Sailor

*Anthony Dalton*

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## **Wayward Sailor** Anthony Dalton

He died in 1995, but his nautical adventure books continue to bring entertainment and escape to legions of fans worldwide. He was larger than life, perhaps the most successful sailing writer of the twentieth century. But, as Anthony Dalton's meticulously researched biography reveals, Tristan Jones was not who he said he was.

*Wayward Sailor* began as an uncomplicated tribute to a great adventurer and writer, but one line of inquiry branched to another, plunging Dalton into a three-year odyssey of his own. With the cooperation of Tristan's friends and supporters, Dalton pursued Tristan's life through correspondence, logbooks, government documents, and interviews worldwide. With each new revelation, Tristan's voyage through life seemed more and more like his greatest adventure.

His real name was Arthur Jones. He was born in Liverpool in 1929, the illegitimate son of a working-class Lancashire girl, and he grew up in orphanages with little education. Too young to see action in the World War II naval battles he would later write about so movingly, he joined the Royal Navy in 1946 and served fourteen unremarkable years.

Arthur Jones then bought an old sailboat and tried his hand at smuggling whiskey cross-Channel. In his early thirties he sailed into a Mediterranean limbo, scraping a living from charters by day and haunting the bars of Ibiza by night. When he was drunk, which was often, he could be loud and obnoxious and had the scars to prove it. He had no family, no attachments, no accomplishments.

Then came a midlife sea change. Arthur Jones looked into his future, imagined greatness, and began to claw his way to it. Having taught himself to sail, he taught himself to write. He was a natural at both. As Tristan Jones, in his midforties, he sailed out of Brazil's Mato Grosso and into a Greenwich Village apartment to write six books in three years and reinvent his past.

The Tristan Jones of his books was born in a storm at sea in 1924 on his father's tramp steamer; was torpedoed three times in epic World War II engagements; completed the first circumnavigation of Iceland; traveled farther north and farther up the Amazon River than any sailor before him; and sailed more than 400,000 miles, 180,000 of them solo. Readers loved his books and crowded his lectures and signings. He had a bard's voice and a street performer's delivery. He had more renown than he could have dreamed.

Having invented a life, Tristan Jones tried to live it. After the amputation of his left leg in 1982 he sailed more than halfway around the world. He lost his right leg in 1991 yet still returned briefly to sea. But as his body failed him, so too did his spirits. It was as if the life from which he'd bodily lifted himself were pulling him down again. He died a bitter man.

*Wayward Sailor* is the biography Tristan Jones did not want. His books were autobiographical, he said; there was no more to tell. But there was. *Wayward Sailor* is the last Tristan Jones story and the most incredible one of all: the story of a man who invented himself.

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