

Captain Living the Dream Megan McLaughlin

by Diane McMahon

photography by Christian Lee

On a cool, sunny Monday morning I watched Megan McLaughlin cross the parking lot at the south end's Starbucks on Hilton Head and walk towards me. She had that effortless grace of a natural athlete, tall, streamlined and at ease.

She wore a long sleeve coral Columbia shirt, a black fleece vest and long pants. Under her visor, her wide smile revealed such perfect teeth I had to remind myself not to stare. She shook my hand firmly and asked how my weekend away with my family was. We were strangers and I was surprised that this young woman even remembered. Her thoughtfulness touched me.

As we continued talking, I discovered this independent, adventurous 30-year-old, female boat captain—who owns and operates Island Time Charters**—may be the nicest, least self-centered person I've met. Immediately, she put her family at the heart of her story. "I grew up in Maryville, Missouri and come from four generations of entrepreneurs. My parents were adventurous and they gave me and my younger sister our sense of adventure and a passion for travel and meeting new people. As a little girl, I told them I wanted to live on an island and have a surfboard when I grew up. My parents were always supportive of anything my sister and I wanted to do. They taught us even if we fail it's fine because we can just pick up the pieces and start over. With that kind of support, nothing scares you." I wanted to grab my phone, call Megan's parents and extend my most sincere congratulations.

But how did Megan choose this island to settle on? During her college years at Northwest Missouri State she was not content to just play soccer and tennis. She decided to start a women's college golf team there, which her father continues to coach. She was a scratch golfer. During the summers she had internships at Crescent Pointe Golf Club in Bluffton and was offered a job after graduation. She moved to Hilton Head eight years ago.

"People paid me money to play outside. That's what I call living the dream. I guess you can say I'm a professional player. I have a garage full of toys: four sets of golf clubs, three surfboards (she more than realized her childhood dream), two kayaks, two mountain bikes and a camping closet full of gear. I love to be outside. At the end of the day I'll make an excuse, like cleaning my garage, just to stay outside."

As a landlocked Missourian, Megan did not grow up with sea islands, salt marshes or coastal waterways. Here on Hilton Head she discovered a whole new world. She went out on her friends' power boats whenever she got the chance.

Observing Megan's passion, a friend encouraged her to start logging her hours for her captain's license. She took the classes and tests and got her license four years ago. She called her family and said, "I think I'm going to do something crazy. I'm going to buy a boat and start my own chartering business." Of course her parents said, "Do it!"

It took her four months to locate the perfect boat. She says, "I was looking for a plush, luxury pleasure craft. It had to seat six passengers and have a table, because sitting around a table promotes all the good memories that happen. And it had to be big enough for my sister, who is six-feet tall, to stretch out."

Megan's motto is "Your day, your way." Her goal is to create the happiest, most special memories for friends and family possible. She wants her guests to feel pampered. She puts down a red carpet on the dock and this symbolizes how they will be treated throughout the trip. I ask whether she has a policy about cell phones. "Before that even comes up I ask for something else. I ask everyone to take off their shoes. Some people resist at first, but it creates a different sense of relaxation. By the end people tell me, 'I love the feel of breeze in my toes.' I really don't have problems with cell phones once their shoes are off."

"Most of my clients are families. I remember our family vacations—taking in everyday, sitting on a balcony watching the sunset, having dinner together and talking. Our parents taught us how to slow down and really enjoy all of it. That's the spirit of family I want to create for other people." Megan's family still tries to get together every month.

Megan unfolds a piece of paper with a quote she reads every day and hands it to me. It talks about proper balance, about loving relationships and a spiritual connection with a higher power. It talks about a great attitude being the difference between barely getting by and loving life. I think Megan lives a life that is better than any dream.

Mr. & Mrs. McLaughlin, in lieu of a phone call, may I simply say you have a very, very fine daughter. Congratulations.



Up Close

Family & Marriage: Laughing, "That's one adventure I haven't gotten to yet." Her sister got engaged in May and will be moving to Ft. Lauderdale. Her fiancé asked Megan for permission to be her brother-in-law.

Captain's License: Megan now has a Master's Captain's License for a 50 gross ton boat and will get her license for a 100 ton boat this year through the Coast Guard.

Lifestyle: Megan doesn't own a TV, she gets up with the sun and considers herself an adrenaline junkie (from sports).

Quotable Wisdom: "I know people fear change, but nine times out of ten, it's for the better."

****To contact Island Time Charters call: 816-261-2410 or visit their Website @ www.islandtimechartershhi.com**