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Sailing dream turns into whale of trip

By Paul Clancy
USA TODAY

William and Simone Butler's lifelong dream of sailing around the world turned out to be a life-or-death adventure.

Early on June 15, eight weeks after their voyage began, they were 1,200 miles off Costa Rica when they sailed into a herd of whales. Several rammed their 39-foot boat. Wa-

BUTLERS, BEFORE AND AFTER, 2A

ter gushed through the hull.

The Miami couple drifted 66 days in a rubber lifeboat before their rescue Saturday 30 miles off Costa Rica. They each lost 50 pounds, survived on raw fish and battled sharks.

Now in a hospital in Goifito, Costa Rica, Butler, 60, and his wife, 52, are ready to go home.

Daughter Sally Smith says her parents are fine. "They had hope, they had faith. They're alive, thank God."

Experts say such whale attacks are rare, but can happen. After sending a mayday signal, they had the presence of mind to grab fishing gear and a sail water converter before

stepping into the rubber life raft. In 15 minutes, their sloop, the *Siboney*, was gone.

At first they had no bait, Butler said. "When a turtle came by, I pulled him out of the water and cut his throat." They lost their hook but were able to dangle bait overboard and grab fish with their hands.

"I forced myself to eat almost two pounds of raw fish a day, and I forced my wife to

eat it, too," he said.

Butler said they saw nearly 40 ships while drifting in the Pacific, but "No one saw us."

The couple left Miami April 23 hoping to reach Spain in 1992 and cross with the Columbus Day regatta.

Miami dockmaster Ralph Dodge watched them sail off that day. "I had a kind of long feeling, wishing I was going with them. Glad I didn't."

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