

Round-the-world Robin meets his daughter today

by MICHAEL DOVE

London D. Express

29-7-69

WHEN Sara Knox-Johnston last saw her father, Robin, almost a year ago he was just another weekend sailor. Today she will see him again—two months after her sixth birthday and 12 days after he became the first round-the-world, non-stop solo yachtsman in his ketch Suhaili.

Robin is driving up to collect her from his former wife, Suzanne, at their home in a picturesque village near Cambridge. He will take her out for the day, buy her a belated birthday present and tell her some of his adventures on his epic 30,000-mile voyage.

Then he will return her to his ex-wife, who has custody.

Sara's mother, a 27-year-old brunette whose marriage to Robin was dissolved in January last year, told me: "I have kept her informed of her father's progress and she has seen him on television since he got back.

"We are both quite proud of him. Like most six-year-olds she is a bit blasé about the whole thing. It is difficult for her to take it all in.

"She goes to a school where there are a lot of children from famous families. It is nice that she can join them with a famous father."

A fuss—twice

Mrs. Knox-Johnston, who works with a veterinary surgeon, received a phone call from her former husband last week, although they do not normally communicate with each other.

"It was just to arrange a visit to Sara," she said. "We did not discuss anything else.

"I was surprised when Robin decided to enter for the race. Everyone made such a fuss over Chichester saying it was the first time ever and so on. Then there was another fuss over Rose, when it was the second time only in a smaller boat.

"Then along comes this latest event for a non-stop race and one begins to think 'just how far can you go?' But once Robin set off I knew he would either win or have a darned good attempt at it. He is that sort of character, determined and rather a lone wolf."

She curled up on a chair and tended to Sara, a pretty brown-eyed child, who was asking for the television to be turned on.

"I am not bitter about the past and I certainly do not regret having married Robin," she said.

Separations

"I won't go into the reasons for our divorce, but it was not sailing that came between us. If you marry a Merchant Navy officer, must expect separations and things like that.

"Robin has always been keen on sailing and boats. I know because we virtually grew up together. As a child I used to live opposite his family and we met when I was nine.

"We became great friends, and he and I and his three brothers used to play around together as a gang. I suppose, like most girls, I was a bit of a tomboy then.

"Obviously things changed later on, and I suppose you could say we had a boy and girl childhood romance. Anyway, we got married in 1962, when I was 20 and he 22.

"About two years after our marriage we went out to Bombay where Robin was stationed. We had a good time there and went sailing often. But I am not like Robin. I like to keep dry land in sight all the time.

"While there Robin sent off for plans to build his own yacht and that was the start of Suhaili. I flew back to England with Sara before the yacht was finished and I have never seen her.

'Unusual man'

"I am rather glad I was married to him. After all he is an unusual man. Well, he must be, mustn't he? You must have something rather special to do what he has done.

"I know the public do not generally realise Robin was married and that he has a daughter. Some people in the village know who I am and of course Sara's school chums know. But it is his life now and nothing to do with me.

"His voyage has been more dignified than that of Sir Francis Chichester's or even Alec Rose's. There was not the same volume of publicity.

"One gets the impression of a man setting out to achieve something and doing it to his satisfaction rather than anyone else's. Good luck to him."

● Robin Knox-Johnston will embark on a coast-to-coast lecture tour of America early in July, his father, David, said yesterday. His American publishers were expected to give him the go-ahead for the tour immediately he had written his book.