

Ice Blink

A Family Navigating Life's Ice-Clogged Waters

A film review by:
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“Ice blink is the name given to a white light seen on the horizon, especially on the underside of low clouds, due to reflection from a field of ice immediately beyond. The Ice Blink was used by both the Inuit and explorers looking for the Northwest Passage to help them navigate safely.” – WikipediA.org

Have you ever touched an iceberg? Have you ever built your own home on land and on the water? Have you ever born and raised children on different oceans? Have you ever gone contrary to convention, not just in life's small things, but in life's big choices? Dave and Jaja Martin have done all of this—and much, much more.

In their latest sailing documentary, *Ice Blink: A Family Navigating Life's Ice-Clogged Waters*, we meet a close-knit family of five, shaped by self-sufficiency through many years of ocean voyaging and adapting to new cultures. The “white light” that the Martin's see on the horizon is invisible to most of us. But this personal Ice Blink has become their sixth sense. On the polar ocean, it has kept their vessel safe from ice and gales; on life's ocean, it has guided them in the choice of a full, unique, and highly unconventional lifestyle.

Ice Blink follows the Martins from their early years as rebellious twenty-some-things to present day parents facing the challenge of launching their teenage children into an uncertain world. The film is segmented into twelve chapters delivering personal wisdom about cruising with children, what makes for a full and happy life, the rewards of following your own inner compass, and the fact that nothing is impossible if you are truly committed in your heart and soul.

From their current location in Round Pond, Maine, Dave and Jaja begin the film by sharing the decision-making process that led them to finally move the family ashore. Finding the balance between an adventurous life-style and one that is best for their children becomes a major theme running throughout the documentary.

The Martin's commentary is framed with dramatic sailing shots through the ice, forays ashore in Iceland and Norway, old photos of a young cruising couple just starting out, passage-making with the kids, and present day scenes of family life ashore and sailing along the Maine coast aboard their 33 foot steel sloop, *Driver*.

Through Dave and Jaja's conversations, we flash back to their early cruising days, their decision to circumnavigate on a 25-foot boat, and the birth of their three children along the way—life events that required considerable adaptation, both physical and mental. Following their circumnavigation and a hiatus ashore, boredom and a strong desire to return to the unconventional cruising lifestyle propelled the Martins on a subsequent cruise to Iceland and Norway where the children got their first taste of public school, all be it in Norwegian.

The Martin children make up a big part of this film, visually and emotionally. The interviews with the two oldest, Holly and Chris, might make some adults a bit uncomfortable. Their views of the world do not match up with those of typical, land-bred teenagers. For one thing, there's been no television in their lives, even now as they live on shore. They are bi-lingual, having had to learn Norwegian during their earlier grade school years in Norway. Don't all kids need to learn a new language when they come to a new school? The two teens are comfortable in the confines of a small cruising sailboat, but admit that privacy aboard was definitely becoming an issue. Climbing to the spreaders was one place they could find some solitude. And using bosun's chairs to fly about the rigging while underway or tied to a far-off pier became their version of skateboarding. Hearing the Martin kids talk about living aboard versus life ashore gives the film yet another layer of wisdom—one that goes well beyond the years of the young crewmembers.

And what of Dave and Jaja? They have foregone all of the usual rituals, pathways, perks, and milestones of a "normal" life ashore. The Martins do not flinch from looking in the mirror at their own lives, and openly discuss the choices they've made and the reasons they've made them. Was it hard to "give it all up and go cruising?" Not really, since they started out so early in life, they literally had nothing to give up. They do recognize that for those of us already anchored to a house, PTA meetings, and Little League, casting off the dock lines can be difficult—without the proper perspective.

The final chapters of the film add more revelations about the Martin's views on life and cruising. Through family stories and sailing anecdotes, the couple shares their take on the rewards of a cruising lifestyle, one done modestly and supported by odd jobs and a knack for finding opportunities where others might accept failure. Their perspective on life closely resembles the Ice Blink—the ability to glimpse the reflection of dangers ahead and successfully navigate a safe passage around them.

For anyone thinking about casting off the dock lines and heading "out there," I highly recommend that you put Ice Blink on your checklist. But even for those shore bound viewers, this film provides a unique glimpse into the rugged individualist mindset of the serious cruising family. TheSailingChannel.Com hoists 5 pennants on its flag halyard for Ice Blink.

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