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Taken by

Pirates

One couple's 388-day ordeal — and their unlikely saviors. By Jeffrey Gettleman

A FLUKE OF TIME WIND

WHEN PAUL AND RACHEL CHANDLER'S SMALL SAILBOAT DRIFTED OFF COURSE AND
WAS HIJACKED BY SOMALI PIRATES, THEY NEVER IMAGINED HOW LONG THEY'D BE
HELD CAPTIVE — OR WHO WOULD ULTIMATELY SAVE THEM. BY JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

“It wasn’t really a pretty night,” Rachel Chandler recalled. Small, sloshing waves were coming from the southeast, and a trickle of wind blew from the southwest. There was no moon, and the stars were shrouded by clouds.

The boat was slowly edging away from Mahé, the main island in the Seychelles archipelago, for Tanga, Tanzania, the beginning of a two-week passage across the Indian Ocean. The wind was pushing them farther north than they’d planned to be. With no ships or land in sight, the Chandlers’ 38-foot sailboat, the Lynn Rival, bobbed along all alone.

Rachel, who is 57, was on watch — it was her turn to do the four-hour shift — and her husband, Paul, was asleep below deck. It was about 2:30 a.m., and she sat in a T-shirt and light trousers at the stern, feeling seasick. Because the wind was so faint, Rachel turned on the sailboat’s small engine, which chugged along at five knots, just loud enough to drown out other noise.

By the time she heard the high-pitched whine of outboard motors at full throttle, she had only seconds to react. Two skiffs suddenly materialized out of the murk, and when she swung the flashlight’s beam onto the water, two gunshots rang out.

“No guns! No guns!” she screamed.

The crack of assault rifles jarred Paul awake. He had been sleeping naked — as he often does on tropical nights — and hesitated before jumping out of the cabin. “The first thing I thought,” said Paul, who is 61, “was pirates.”

Indian Ocean, Oct. 23, 2009, 2:30 a.m.



Within seconds, eight scruffy Somali men hoisted themselves aboard, their assault rifles and rocket-propelled-grenade launchers clanging against the hull. Paul activated an emergency beacon, which immediately started emitting an S.O.S., and then went up on deck. The men stank of the sea and nervous musk, and they jabbed their guns at the Chandlers.

“Stop engine!” they shouted. “Crew, crew! How many crew number?”

One pirate was particularly concerned about anything flashing, and Paul’s heart sank when the pirate stomped below deck and discovered the emergency beacon, blinking like a strobe, and promptly switched it off. The pirates ordered the Chandlers not to touch anything else, and then they demanded a shower.

This was Oct. 23, 2009. The Chandlers would be held for the next 388 days. In the past few years, loosely organized gangs of Somali pirates, kitted out with Fiberglas skiffs, rusty Kalashnikovs and flip-flops, have waylaid hundreds of ships — yachts, fishing boats, freighters, gigantic oil tankers, creaky old Indian dhows, essentially anything that floats — and then extracted ransom in exchange for their return. As a result, the worldwide shipping industry now spends billions of dollars on higher insurance premiums, armed guards and extra fuel to detour thousands of miles away from the Gulf of Aden, a congested shipping lane just off Somalia’s coast leading to the Red Sea. Navies from more than two dozen countries patrol Somalia’s coast, burning around a million dollars of fuel

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per day. And yet 2011 is on track to be another banner year for piracy, with more than 20 ships already seized, hundreds of seamen in captivity and the average ransom now fetching upward of \$5 million, a fortune anywhere but especially in a country with no government and an economy that has been decimated by decades of war. Of all the thousands of people who have been held for ransom, though, few, if any, would endure as long — and as intimate — an experience behind pirate lines as Paul and Rachel Chandler.

“I fell in love with her voice,” Paul says of his wife. And Rachel does have a beautiful voice, precise and soft. It was London, 1979. He was an engineer for a Brazilian company; she was working for a supplier of windows. They talked on the phone about some construction project, and Paul was hooked.

When they met, Paul discovered that Rachel was tall, actually a couple of inches taller than he was, and thin, with pale skin and a shock of red hair. They dated for a year and a half, married and soon moved to Doha, Qatar, where Paul found some work and where a Palestinian guy named Sammy taught Rachel how to sail. (Paul had been sailing since he was a kid.) When they returned to England a few years later, they started out by buying a share in the Lynn Rival, a modest yacht, if there is such a thing, just big enough for oceanic trips. They never had children, and when they retired a few years ago, they began sailing full time, exploring the Adriatic, the Red Sea, Egypt, India, Sudan, Oman and Eritrea, blogging about their adventures all the way.

It was a dreamy but hardly luxurious life. Paul would catch snapper in the hours before dawn and Rachel would fry them up for lunch. They’d bake their own bread in the yacht’s shoebox-size oven and sleep onboard even when in port, to save on hotel costs. The Lynn Rival is a pretty, teak-trimmed boat, but she’s 30 years old, and life aboard was filled with oiling, cleaning, tightening, rewiring and constantly fixing the cranky toilet.

They were fully aware that the Indian Ocean was a hunting ground for Somali pirates, but Paul is a Cambridge-trained engineer with a hyper-rational way of looking at the world, and he considered

the risks of being hijacked to be equivalent to slamming into a partly submerged shipping container in the middle of the ocean — meaning theoretically possible but very remote. Technically, he's right. A few dozen ships are hijacked each year, out of the tens of thousands that sail past Somalia, putting the odds of being captured at about 0.1 percent. And the Seychelles, a sumptuous vacation spot, were pretty safe at that time, though pirates have since discovered it.

“The idea of getting kidnapped and held for a long time was not in my mind,” Paul said. “It was very hard to believe anybody would be interested in us. And while we were aware of the broader dangers — ”

“It wasn't deemed high-risk,” Rachel said, finishing his sentence, as each often does.

“It was a fluke of the wind that put us where we were,” Paul said.

Once the pirates were in control of the Lynn Rival, they ransacked it, flinging open cupboards, eating all of the Chandlers' cookies and stealing their money, watches, rings, electronics, their satellite phone and clothes. There were now 10 men; two more pirates had scampered onboard to join the others. After showering and draining the Chandlers' entire supply of fresh water, they started trying on outfits. A broad-shouldered buccaneer named Buggas, who appeared to be the boss, was especially fond of their waterproof trousers, parading up and down the deck wearing them, while some of the other pirates strutted around in Rachel's brightly colored pants and blouses.

The pirates lashed their skiffs to the Lynn Rival and reset the course for Somalia. But with the winds so limp, it could take two weeks. Buggas needed a faster getaway, so he made contact with another group of pirates on the Kota Wajar, a Singaporean freighter that was recently hijacked.

“Speak this man!” he shouted at Paul, thrusting the satellite phone into his hand. “They rescue us.”

It was Paul's introduction to the loose fraternity of Somali pirates and to one of the pirates' newest strategic advances: the mother ship. Mother ships

are larger vessels — also usually hijacked — that serve as floating bases, with weeks of food and fuel aboard. The mother ships prowl the ocean with the faster attack skiffs tied alongside, allowing pirates to commandeer vessels 1,000 miles offshore. Their strike zone is now more than two million square miles of water, which is virtually impossible to patrol. Jay Bahadur, author of a new book, “The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World,” likens the international naval efforts to “a losing game of Whac-a-Mole.”

Paul spoke to the freighter's Pakistani captain, who had a gun to his head, and arranged a rendezvous. Right as the Chandlers' boat was about to tie up to the hijacked freighter, a British Navy ship that had been trailing from a distance started to close in. Buggas jammed his Kalashnikov in Paul's face, telling him in broken English that he had better radio the ship to back off.

“Please turn away or we will be killed,” Paul told the navy, and moments later the British ship slid away.

The Kota Wajar — which already had more than a dozen captured crewmen on board — lumbered 150 miles or so to the Somali coast, where it soon joined several other hijacked ships anchored near the beach, a floating community of hostages. Being around fellow captives gave Rachel a trace of comfort, knowing she and Paul were not totally alone. Almost all hostages are kept on their boats, but Buggas deviated from the standard pirate script and grunted that it was time to go ashore. Rachel remembers stepping into a skiff, petrified, seeing some white faces looking down from a nearby hijacked Spanish fishing trawler and then slamming into a desolate beach.

“I remember it almost being like a shipyard,” Paul said. “It was like a little base.” Dozens of men — all of them carrying guns — were working on the beach with disc cutters, welders and other power tools, preparing a fleet of boats for future hijacking missions.

Right behind the little base were two freshly washed Toyota trucks parked in the sand. As they stepped in, Rachel saw Buggas wearing Paul's Rolex and commented, “Oh, look, he's wearing your

watch.” One of the men sitting in the front seat overheard her and confronted Buggas, who then sheepishly handed the Rolex back to Paul. The man, who spoke English, was better-dressed than Buggas and wasn’t armed. He had an educated air about him, the Chandlers said, and they recalled this moment as the first of their endless attempts to decipher in whose hands their fate really rested.

“We didn’t know who these guys were,” Mohamed Aden said of the pirates who took the Chandlers. “They were nobodies, people we call cockroaches, gangsters, new to the system. It was the first time they had brought anybody to land, the first time they had ever captured anybody. It took us six months to establish who they were.”

Aden, who is better known by his childhood nickname, Tiiceey, is the president of the Himan and Heeb administration, a small, clan-based government recently established in central Somalia. Two decades of unabated chaos has resulted in these tiny statelets popping up across the country. By latest count, there are more than 20, formed by members of the same clan — the one fundamental element of Somali society that has not been totally eviscerated by civil war. There is the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu, Somalia’s bullet-pocked capital, which has received millions of dollars in support from the United States and the United Nations. But the T.F.G. was assembled outside the country and doesn’t have much grass-roots support. It barely controls Mogadishu and is completely irrelevant in central Somalia.

Aden works from a shell of a house in Adado, a trading town about 200 miles from the coast. He dresses and talks like a rapper, with Kangol caps and baggy pants and an iPhone clipped to his hip. He is a naturalized American and spent years in Minneapolis running a small health-care company before being drafted by elders in his clan, the Saleban, to spearhead the Himan and Heeb administration. In 2009, I spent two weeks observing his efforts to build a government from scratch, complete with a functioning police force, environmental laws and schools. But Aden had, and still has, a pirate problem. Technically, Himan and Heeb’s jurisdiction extends to the coast, but Aden has no authority there; the area is controlled instead by pirate gangs, most of them fellow Saleban.

“I don’t have the firepower to take these guys on,” Aden said. “I’d like to, but I can’t.”

Instead, Aden has become chummy with some of Somalia’s more notorious pirates, many of whom take nicknames like Son of a Liar, Red Butt, Red Teeth and Big Mouth. Big Mouth is considered one of the founding fathers of Somali piracy and recently branched into the business of distributing khat, the leaf millions of Somalis chew for a pleasant, mild high that provides a temporary reprieve from their bleak reality. Together, Aden and Big Mouth rebuilt Adado’s airstrip to bring in more khat, which has become a major source of income for Aden’s small administration (Aden taxes each flight) and Big Mouth’s growing enterprise.

“What am I going to do?” Aden said, with a smile. “I’m trying to develop my area.”

After the Chandlers were taken, Aden went straight to Big Mouth to find out who the abductors were, but even Big Mouth didn’t know. In recent years, as ransoms have climbed, thousands of destitute, uneducated Somali youth have jumped into the hijacking business, and all anyone in Adado knew was that a young upstart named Buggas had taken the Chandlers to a desiccated smudge of a town called Amara, near the coast, and that Amara locals were backing him up. Local support is crucial, because holding hostages — especially for a long period — can become expensive. You need to keep them fed and most important, heavily guarded — so a rival pirate gang or Islamist militia doesn’t rekidnap them. Paul figures it was costing Buggas nearly \$20,000 a month to hold them hostage: with around \$300 per day spent on khat; \$100 a day on goats; maybe a couple hundred more for tea, sugar, powdered milk, fuel, ammunition and other supplies. Then there’s payroll — in the Chandlers’ case, cash for the pirate raiding party and their 30 henchmen who rotated as guards on shore. On top of this come the translators, who charge a hefty fee to interact with the hostages and negotiate a ransom.

Pirates tend to operate on credit — borrowing all these resources from community members or other pirates, who will then get a cut, or in Somali, a sami, once a ransom is delivered. In Amara, rumors quickly began to fly that the Chandlers were rich — possibly even British M.P.’s — and were therefore the ideal sami opportunity.



Captivity in Amara, Somalia.

“People were saying it would take just two months for a ransom and then they would get double,” Aden remembered. “They invest \$5,000, they get \$10,000 back. That’s a good return, right?”

A mara lies on a wind-raked plain, surrounded by sand dunes and scrub brush bristling with bone-white thorns. I passed through there in 2009 and remember hundreds of squat, little huts packed together, an incongruously tall cellphone tower and sandy roads littered with donkey dung. Buggas moved the couple around a lot, sometimes locking them in houses inside Amara, where they could hear goats bleating or children playing just outside the gates, other times setting up crude camps in the bush with plastic tarps stretched between the trees.

For Rachel, the days all blur together. She would get up around dawn, when the desert was just bearably cool. Paul would sleep a little later. They would try their best to ingest a breakfast of goat liver and then wash up with a jerrycan of well water. They would read the few books they were allowed to grab from the yacht and write in their diaries. Paul tended to focus on the here and now: “Overcast, a little wind,” reads one entry in neat blue ink. “Another sleepless night” was another. Rachel tended to be more introspective with longer entries in perfectly formed script. The smells they remember are sweat, the stinky perfume the pirates

would douse themselves with and the scent of the charcoal, which had been soaked in diesel. Sometimes, in the morning, if they felt motivated, they did yoga together; once Paul turned around to see half a dozen gunmen earnestly following along. It seemed everyone was horribly bored.

“I was struggling,” Rachel told me in May, as she sat in her carpeted living room in a small home in Dartmouth, England, where the Chandlers have been living since being freed. “I’d get through the early part of the morning, and then the heat and humidity would build up, and I’d be lying there thinking, I don’t want to read, I don’t want to do anything, how am I going to get through the next 10 minutes, let alone 10 hours, let alone 10 days?”



Lunch was a mound of plain spaghetti, typically served in nauseatingly large portions. Then nap time and maybe laundry. Sweetened boiled beans and rice for dinner. They didn't interact much with the pirates, who would occasionally bark at them to borrow their scissors or listen to their radio. Then sleep.

Buggas appeared to be calling all the shots, which dismayed the Chandlers because he seemed uneducated, temperamental and crass. They kept hoping some wiser, more experienced pirates would show up and realize they were not rich and strike a deal for a more modest ransom. But that never happened. Buggas was supremely confident that he was on the verge of making millions — he had two white people in his hands, after all.

“British government pay big money, no problem,” he kept saying.

“He wasn't an intelligent thug,” Rachel said. “He was just a thug.” She closed her eyes and drew a composite sketch of him in her mind: around 33 years old, fairly thickset, round, chunky face, low forehead, small eyes, fleshy lips that he tended to leave open. He was constantly threatening them: “No money, you dead, kill you.”

The problem was that the Chandlers didn't have much money. They had spent around \$75,000 to buy and fix up the Lynn Rival, and they owned a two-bedroom apartment in Tunbridge Wells, a London suburb, worth around \$250,000, and some retirement accounts, which brought the total to \$500,000. The pirates scoffed at such petty cash and demanded \$7 million and told Paul to find a negotiator.

“Negotiator?” Paul said. “I don't have a negotiator.” He suggested the pirates call Rachel's older brother, Stephen Collett, a retired farmer back in England. Stephen, who is writing a book about the kidnapping, politely declined to discuss details about the 200 or so calls he made to the pirates. He still seems shaken up. “How would you feel if you got a phone call from a guy who says, ‘I got your sister and her husband at gunpoint so you better send us everything you got and more and you'll be lucky if you get them back’?”

The Chandlers soon deduced that escape or rescue was unlikely. The pirates operated with to-

tal impunity in their patch of Somalia. People were always coming by the camp — young men, young women and, as Rachel put it, “elderlylike characters” who would sit for hours with the gang, talking, laughing, leisurely sipping little cups of tea, making it abundantly clear that the whole community was complicit and that no one would help them. For Paul, who is unfailingly polite and gentle, a man whose voice rarely clears a whisper, this is what brings out the bitterness.

“Everybody was in on it,” he said. “I'm angry at Somali society. I'm angry at a community.”

In a rough, industrial part of northeast London, next to an auto-body shop and behind an unmarked door, is Universal TV. It includes a suite of offices and a bare-bones TV studio with a black velvet curtain and a giant map of Africa. Veiled Somali women drift in and out, and prayer-capped Somali men make the run to the gas station up the street to get Fanta and potato chips. If there is any nucleus of the Somali diaspora, any glue holding together a people who have been scattered by war and settled everywhere from Sydney to Minneapolis, it is Universal TV, which broadcasts news and other shows worldwide in Somali and is seen as keeping a sense of nationhood intact while Somalia sorts out its mess.

Ridwaan Haji Abdiwali is one of Universal's on-air news anchors, a 28-year-old refugee who was hit by a stray bullet during Somalia's civil war before fleeing to England seven years ago. He has thoughtful, hooded eyes and his own weekly television show called “Have Your Say.” More than anything, he is deeply embarrassed about his homeland, which has lurched from crisis to crisis since 1991, when clan warlords tore down the central government and then fought among themselves.

“It's a constant source of sorrow,” Abdiwali said. “I feel guilty when I see my country. No education, no peace, no international relationships, no economy.”

But the hijacking of the Chandlers was especially shameful. It was all over the news, perfect tabloid fodder, one of the biggest-running stories of the time — two pensioner Brits “on the trip of a lifetime” now in the hands of Somali gunmen. Abdiwali remembers sitting with other students in the canteen at the University of Westminster when

yet another Chandler update came on TV. “Oh, my God,” his friends groaned about the pirates. “They’re morons, they’re criminals.”

Abdiwali started focusing his hourly show on the Chandlers and even called up Buggas and his fellow pirates and berated them on the air. “They’re not rich ship owners,” Abdiwali told the pirates.

“These people are innocent and you should release them.” His initial strategy, he told me, was to heap shame on the pirates for kidnapping two elderly people and to show England that not all Somalis were criminals and morons.

Abdiwali and some others at Universal TV then turned to Abdi Shire Jama, who was a freelance interpreter in London and a talented songwriter. Jama thought a music video would help spread the word, so he produced a song called “Release the Couple,” soon broadcast on Universal and YouTube. It begins with a Somali kid with a British accent saying, “I hope this message gets to the people who are responsible for holding Rachel and Paul Chandler.” Then, after a burst of synthetic drums and some squeaky Somali music, five Somali singers break into song.

“Our people fled their homes. . . . The host countries did not look at the color of our skins. . . . We need to show our debt to them, for it is the donkey who does not acknowledge the debt.”

But Jama’s song also captures an ambivalence many ex-pat Somalis feel about piracy. While it implores the pirates to release “Rachel and her husband, Paul, and his wife,” it also says: “This song is to remind you to fight those foreign vessels which come to illegally fish from our seas and to dump poisonous wastes in our seas. This is national defense.”

After Somalia’s central government collapsed 20 years ago, the 1,900-mile coastline became an unpatrolled free-for-all, with foreign fishing trawlers descending to scoop up Somalia’s rich stocks of tuna, shark, whitefish, lobster and deep-water shrimp. With no authorities to fear, the fishing boats were especially unscrupulous and used heavy steel drag nets that wiped out the marine habitat for years. Somali piracy was born when disgruntled fishermen armed themselves and started attacking

the foreign trawlers. They soon realized they could attack any ship and get a ransom for holding the crew hostage.

“In the beginning, the pirates had a lot of support,” explained Kayse Maxamed, a Somali who works in mental health in Bristol and who organized a “Save the Chandlers” rally in front of a mosque in early 2010. “Everybody liked them. They represented the Somali Navy.”

The pirate gangs played on this sentiment, taking names like “Somali Marines,” “Defenders of Somali Territorial Waters,” “Central Somali Coast Guard” and “Ocean Salvation Corps.”

But the kidnapping of the Chandlers made many otherwise sympathetic Somalis realize the pirates were, at their most elemental level, simply seafaring extortionists who were giving all Somalis a bad name. Maxamed, Abdiwali and Jama said they had absolutely no trouble getting hundreds of other British Somalis to join their cause. At one big Save the Chandlers meeting in Camden in early 2010, someone suggested that every member of Britain’s Somali community, estimated to number anywhere from 100,000 to 500,000, contribute 10 pounds toward the ransom. But before this could get off the ground, the British Foreign Office contacted several community leaders, including Maxamed, and reminded them that British government policy was never to pay ransom. Maxamed and others said they were forced to drop the idea, which meant that the situation in Amara would drag on.

By this point, Buggas and his gang were becoming extremely agitated. A small airplane had been buzzing over their camp — possibly British secret service — and the Chandlers’ family in England, now three months into this, was refusing to negotiate with the pirates.

“Family no speak,” Buggas kept grumbling. “Family no speak.”

One day he marched to the entrance of the lean-to where the Chandlers were sleeping, a messy bush camp with mattresses lying in the dirt, ammunition tins carelessly baking in the heat and plastic sheeting stretched overhead.

“You go, one, one,” Buggas ordered. “Paul, bags, go.”

Buggas’s plan was to separate the Chandlers to make them as miserable as possible so they would urge their relatives to cough up the cash. But the Chandlers refused and roped their arms around each other. It was more than just the fear of being lonely, Rachel explained. “We didn’t want to die alone,” she said. “At the time, we couldn’t see how we were going to get out of this place.”

Buggas snatched up his gun and blasted three shots in the air.

“Come out!” he yelled. “Come out!”

The Chandlers clutched each other even tighter.

“You crazy,” said one of the guards, whom the Chandlers had nicknamed Mr. Fastidious for the exacting way he always folded up his ratty little bed roll.

Paul snapped back, “You crazy.”

Buggas raced over to a tree and yanked out a root. With a big knife he stripped it smooth. He started ferociously whipping the Chandlers, aiming for Rachel’s head. They crumpled to the ground, and the other pirates pulled them apart. Until this point, though they had been threatened many times with loaded assault rifles, the Chandlers had never been beaten. It seemed that the pirates were reluctant to even touch them — until now.

As several gunmen dragged Paul away, he turned around to catch a glimpse of Rachel on her knees, screaming: “Bastards! Murderers!” That’s when Buggas ran up to her and smashed the back of his rifle into her jaw, shearing off a tooth.

Thus began three long months of solitude. The Chandlers were stuck in little huts in Amara only a few miles away from each other but weren’t allowed to communicate. Paul tried to keep himself occupied, sketching in his journal and making a phrase book of Somali words — “bowl,” “banana,” “knife,” “bald.” There was one man, the cook, who occasionally spoke to him. “I did have moments when I sat in that chair and cried,” Paul said. “I knew it wasn’t productive. I was just treating myself to a few moments of it. I knew I could survive.”

At this point Paul began his “begging calls” to relatives. While Rachel had qualms about leaning on family members, Paul said he saw the whole ordeal “purely as a commercial transaction. I would pay every penny I could scrimp, borrow or steal to get me and Rachel out of there.”

But even accessing their savings was complicated. The Chandlers were officially under duress, the family’s solicitor informed Stephen, and therefore not considered mentally fit to hand over control of their accounts.

Paul fumed on the phone to his brother-in-law Stephen: “Tell the solicitor to use the money for a gravestone and bring it out here himself!” He told me: “I knew we weren’t going to get out without money being paid. It’s as simple as that.”

Paul dealt primarily with a translator named Ali, who was negotiating with Stephen. Ali didn’t fraternize much with the guards, who were mostly in their early 20s. Ali was a bit older and wore crisp button-down shirts, sunglasses, a gold wristwatch and gold chains. According to lawyers who handle piracy cases, pirate translators tend to be educated men from within the community who work for several different pirate gangs and are typically paid a flat fee, which can reach \$200,000 — they are essentially white-collar pirates.

Rachel, meanwhile, was completely isolated. Buggas had instructed the guards not to talk to her. Rachel’s cook would throw down a bowl of food and then just pad away. She started talking to herself and chanting, sometimes mimicking the call to prayer. “Shut up or I beat you!” Buggas would yell. It tormented her to think that Buggas and his gang were actually going to profit from her misery. She wanted to deny them that and felt spite bubbling up inside her. She was completely powerless to control her fate — except in one way. She had hidden a couple of razor blades in her hut and fantasized about slitting her wrists at night so the pirates would wake up to find her sprawled in a pool of blood.

“But the problem was I wouldn’t be able to see their faces,” she ultimately realized. “So what’s the point of that?”

In late January, a doctor, Abdi Mohamed Elmi,



No. 14, 2010, the Somali desert, near Adado.

known as Dr. Hangul, was allowed to see the Chandlers. Mohamed Dahir, a Somali journalist, tagged along and filmed the visit, selling it to Sky News in Britain. Dahir was shocked at how bad Rachel looked.

“She was sitting under a tarp in a bush camp, completely out of it,” he said. “She had gotten even skinnier. She had trenches under her eyes. She kept saying: ‘I need my husband. I want to see my husband before I die.’”

Mohamed Dahir’s footage deeply unnerved the Somali community in Britain. People began to worry that the Chandlers might die in captivity. Of course, the pirates wouldn’t intentionally kill them and spoil their chances of a ransom. But as the Somali diaspora knew, the desert is unforgiving.

Abdiwali and the other members of the informal Free the Chandlers coalition began to recalibrate their strategy. It was time to play the clan card, they decided. Somalia is one of the most homogeneous countries on the planet, with nearly everyone sharing the same religion (Sunni Islam), the same language (Somali), the same race and same ethnicity, but Somalis are divided into a dizzying number of clans. Most areas, except for the big towns, are dominated by a single clan.

Though pirates aren’t totally responsive to clan structure, they are not immune from it either. Clan elders still have some authority across Somalia — even if they don’t have the militias to back it up — and they can marshal community pressure and make it difficult for pirates to continue to operate in their areas.

Abdiwali used his television show to focus pressure on the Saleban, the dominant clan in Amara and the clan of Buggas and his men. “I said this could be bad for your clan,” remembered Abdiwali, who is from a different clan. “Actually,” he corrected himself, “this is sensitive. I didn’t actually say ‘clan.’ I said this could be bad for the name of your area, because if I say ‘clan,’ some people are going to say, ‘Ridwaan, you hate this clan.’”

Before long, the pirates were threatening to kill Abdiwali. But he was no stranger to death threats. He had been harassed countless times before by the Shabab, an Islamist militant group in Somalia that routinely beheads people, so he shrugged off the pirates’ threats.

As the weeks passed and more British Somalis found themselves drawn into conversations about the Chandlers, in gathering places like the Blue

Ocean restaurant in Shepherd's Bush or the Euro Discount Shop in Bristol (where bundles of khat are sold from cardboard boxes on the floor), the talk inevitably turned to the issue of clan.

"There was this huge debate," recalled Mursal Kadiye, a Saleban businessman who has been involved in several hostage negotiations, including helping resolve the hijacking of the Sirius Star, a Saudi supertanker seized with \$100 million of oil inside. "People were saying: 'How can you guys let them do this? Don't you have political leaders? Don't you have clan elders? How can you let them hold two elderly people in Saleban territory?' It was embarrassing."

For Kadiye's brother, Dahir Kadiye, a former taxi driver who recently set up a branch of an international security company in Mogadishu, it was even worse. Dahir's teenage son, Yusuf, was being teased at his school in London. Kids were calling him pirate.

Dahir Kadiye started reaching out to fellow clansmen in Amara and Adado, warning them that if the Chandlers died, the world wouldn't just hold Somalia responsible; it would hold the Saleban responsible. In Amara, elders were hitting a similar note. Ali Abdi, who owns a small general store, tried to persuade the pirates that keeping the Chandlers was now becoming a risk for the entire community.

"A lot of people came, including a father whose son was a pirate, and told the pirates that these people might die in their hands," Abdi remembered.

But Buggas and the gang didn't budge. They needed their money. Their operating expenses were growing daily, and by this point they had many creditors — some of them heavily armed — who were expecting to be paid back.

By the spring, after the Chandlers had spent six months in captivity, local opinion was turning against Buggas and his crew. "People were making fun of the pirates," said Mohamed Dahir, the journalist. "Everybody was saying they have this big debt and they're holding an old couple who don't have any money." Dr. Hangul, the physician who made that first visit with Dahir, said, "The pirates were afraid to even walk around Adado."

Dr. Hangul also told me that Buggas was not actually in charge. "He was just the chief of security, chief of the militia," he said. "He was working for three or four investors who were making the decisions."

In many Somali piracy cases, a committee of investors or creditors fronts the cash for the piracy mission, and it's up to the head gunman to deliver a tidy profit. But finally it seemed to dawn on Buggas and his creditors that they weren't going to make much of a profit on this one. Stephen and Ali were negotiating a payment under a half-million dollars, all the Chandler family could afford and, for the pirates, a humiliating fraction of what corporate shipowners typically pay. (One pirate gang operating not far from Amara made \$9.5 million last year by hijacking a Korean oil tanker called the Samho Dream.)

Stephen started looking into chartering a plane in Nairobi to package the money and deliver it to Buggas. Because of the profusion of hijackings over the past several years, several companies now specialize in making money drops.

Buggas agreed to reunite the Chandlers while the arrangements were being finalized. As we sat in her living room, Rachel described seeing Paul for the first time in three months as he stepped out of a truck with his dusty bags to move back into her hut. Her usual composure cracked for a moment, and she began to cry.

"I thought, My goodness, he looks so old and frail," she said. "But then he smiled. And it was just Paul's smile. Even Buggas was standing benevolently by and saying, 'Are you happy?' Can you believe it?"

In mid-June, Ali the translator showed up at the bush camp with a typed-out sheet of paper, in English, essentially a pirate contract. "It's standard pirate procedure," Stephen told me. The letter stipulated that the Chandler family would pay \$440,000 and "the pirates" — this word was used in the contract — would promptly release them. Ali signed the contract and faxed it to Stephen, who then spoke to Rachel. "The plane is on its way," Rachel remembers Stephen saying about the aircraft that would drop the money. "See you in Nairobi soon."

“Our hopes were sky high,” Paul told me.

But then nothing happened. The Chandlers stayed in their bush camp. When they asked their guards what was going on, all the pirates would say was, “No fly today.” Or tomorrow. Or the next day. Dejected, they wondered whether Stephen got cold feet and backed out.

When Mohamed Dahir, the journalist, returned in July, he whispered to the Chandlers that the money drop had been made; the pirates received nearly \$450,000. Rachel exploded. “Bastards!” she yelled. “You got the money!”

Around this time, Aden, the president of the Himan and Heeb administration, was trying to cut his own deal. He was just on the verge of attracting aid groups — word was beginning to spread that Adado was an oasis of stability in otherwise-violent central Somalia — and the last thing he needed was his little domain to be associated with the imprisonment of Western hostages. He raised \$50,000 from local businessmen and says he nearly persuaded Buggas and the gang to take it. But then some people called from Nairobi and London and told Buggas to hold out for more. Aden wouldn’t be specific about who these meddlers were — maybe he didn’t know. But often in pirate cases, strangers — typically Somali businessmen — insert themselves into the delicate negotiations, offering their services to the families of captives or to the pirates in hopes of getting a slice of the ransom.

“This is a funny business,” Aden said. “Everybody wants to get a benefit for themselves and not for Paul and Rachel.”

By this point, Paul was sick of playing the good hostage. When the gunmen would ask to use his radio or deck of cards, he’d simply refuse. What were they going to do to him, anyway? He remembers one night when the gang had just received some new cellphones, and while he was trying to go to sleep, they were making a racket. He stood up in his underwear and yelled, “Shut up!” After a stunned silence, one of them said weakly, “Problem?”

In November, Dahir Kadiye, whose son was teased in school, decided to go to Adado. His

plan, he said, was to use the contacts he had made through his small security company to bring the Chandlers home. But what exactly happened after that remains murky. Aden and several others told me emphatically that Kadiye, along with Dr. Hangul and other Saleban elders living abroad, cobbled together several hundred thousand dollars to pay off the pirates. The money was collected secretly, Aden said, and a rich Somali woman living in the Persian Gulf contributed \$100,000 to make sure the deal went through.

Dr. Hangul has a somewhat different version. He recently told me that the Somali government, through Kadiye, paid the pirates several hundred thousand dollars after Somalia’s president, Sheik Sharif, met with the British prime minister, Gordon Brown, in March 2010. Somali officials wouldn’t comment on whether they paid a ransom. A British diplomat familiar with the Chandler case said that his government “doesn’t pay ransom, doesn’t condone the paying of the ransom and doesn’t encourage the paying of ransom,” adding that if the Somali government “did contribute to the ransom — and I heard that too, though I can’t say it’s a fact — it certainly wasn’t the result of any meeting or conversation with us.”

Kadiye vehemently denies that any additional money was paid. He says that all he used to lubricate the final deal was “systematic community pressure.”

The Chandlers said they had the impression that a second payment was made. One day, Buggas came up to them, when there were no other gunmen in earshot, and said something like, “My

Somali family give two hundred,” referring to his clan. (The pirates always spoke in thousands.)

On Nov. 13, 2010, more than a year after they were taken, the Chandlers were told to pack their bags. They climbed into the Toyotas, and it seemed as if the whole village of Amara piled into the sandy road to wave goodbye. “We weren’t letting our hopes rise too high,” Paul said. “But we had this sense.”

They drove for hours, heading west, deep into the desert. Buggas sat in the back of their truck,

cheeks bulging with khat, a machine gun on his lap. His last words to them were, “Rachel, you go London tomorrow.”

The next day at dawn, they stepped out of the truck and saw a Somali man approaching them. He was wearing a flack jacket and a baseball cap and had a British passport in his hand. He said “I’m Kadiye, and I’ve come to take you home.”

“I thought, What’s this guy doing here?” Rachel said. “We had no idea who he was.”

But then Kadiye hugged them. “It was just extraordinary, this Somali hugging us,” Rachel recalled giddily. “I just thought, this guy is for real, he must be a kind man, because we had not experienced that sort of true kindness that you can recognize in that way, somehow, in a hug.”

It was at that instant, with Kadiye’s arms around them, that the Chandlers realized they were finally free. But Kadiye said they were still in danger — other pirates or bandits might be lurking around, and they needed to move fast. They finally made it to Adado, where Aden served them tea, toast and eggs — “a full English breakfast,” he joked — and then some officials with Somalia’s transitional government helped fly the Chandlers to Mogadishu and on to Nairobi, Kenya.

After they arrived in London a few days later, they slept a lot. Paul found it therapeutic to immerse himself in simple tasks, like checking the air in his tires and getting a new ATM card. To his distress, he learned that his 99-year-old father died while they were in captivity and now, in addition to reclaiming their affairs, they had to straighten out his dad’s too.

But they were energized by an especially bright and surprising piece of news: the Lynn Rival had not simply drifted away to disappear into the ocean; the British Navy had recovered her and brought her back home. She’s now in a boatyard near Dartmouth, a quaint English town full of fudge shops, the opposite end of the universe from Somalia. That country seems to only go from bad to worse. A famine is sweeping the southern regions, Islamist militants have recently gone on another beheading spree and the pirates are growing more ambitious and more violent. In Septem-

ber, they struck on land in Kenya. In the middle of the night, they zoomed up in a speedboat to a fancy beach resort in Kiwayu, burst into a bungalow and attacked a British couple, killing the husband and then bundling up the wife and disappearing with her. Recent reports indicate they are now holding the woman hostage hundreds of miles away from the Kenyan border, deep inside Somalia, in — it turns out — Amara. Kadiye says he’s trying to get involved.

The Chandlers insist they have had no lasting damage from the experience, physical or psychological, except, in Paul’s words, “We’ve spent 2 percent of our lives in Somalia.”

Shortly after they returned, the Chandlers agreed to a series of interviews with a London tabloid and a TV station for around \$275,000 and then started working on a book, “Hostage,” which was published last month in England. They did this with one goal in mind, they told me: make enough money to pay back their families and fix their boat, which still has a bullet hole in the boom. But spending their time in such a sedentary way is clearly frustrating to them. They had planned to while away these years seeing the world, and they don’t know many people in Dartmouth. Their community is each other and perhaps the wider world of equally passionate sailors who have devoted their lives to floating on the ocean.

Profiting from their ordeal, Rachel says, is “just a means to an end, and the end will be getting back on the Lynn Rival,” though they are going

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SAID ONE OF THE GUARDS.
PAUL SNAPPED BACK,
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to stay out of the Indian Ocean for the time being. The Caribbean will probably be their first trip, next summer. “If you’ve got a nice breeze and you’re just creaming along and if you’ve got a clear sky and nobody else is out there,” she said, her voice trailing off. “I just love it. I do feel truly that I’m on my own, this little speck in our universe.”

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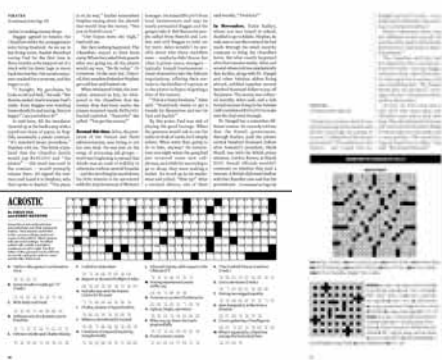
THE HEAT AND HUMIDITY WOULD BUILD UP, RACHEL CHANDLER SAID, AND F'D BE LYING THERE, THINKING... HOW AM I GOING TO GET THROUGH THE NEXT 10 MINUTES LET ALONE IN MONTHS, LET ALONE 10 DAYS?



SUGGAS ENKYNCHED UP HIS GUN AND BLASTED THREE SHOTS IN THE AIR. COME OUT! HE YELLED. THE CHANDLERS SAID ONE OF THE GUARDS PAUL SNAPPED BACK YOU CRAZY



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