

ARCTIC EAST 1973



We have all seen and heard the television commercial that begins "once around life; once around living...." Usually, two handsome actors command their ship into exotic ports of call and celebrate their arrival with smiles and beer as the natives rejoice. The "gusto life" they call it. For most people, this advertising fantasy remains just that and the gusto comes from a six-pack cooling in the ice box.

Late in June 1973, the Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus arrived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for the annual week of old fashioned "circus days." Set up on the lakefront near the entrance to the Milwaukee River and under the shadow of the new harbor bridge, the midway and big-top brought color and excitement to the usually drab area.

At night, a person could walk down Erie Street, east from the Caradaro Club, and hear the sounds and feel the excitement of circus life. Bengal tigers, carnival barkers and the steam calliope combined to bring out the vagabond that secretly lingers in every man.

If you would walk further down Erie Street to where it ended in gravel parking lot emptiness, you would find another travelling show. The United States Coast Guard Cutter *SOUTHWIND*. Splendid in her new coat of white and orange, her polar outlines incongruous with midwestern America, the icebreaker was preparing for a journey to the land she knew best. On

Monday, July 2, *SOUTHWIND* would cast off her lines after many weeks of landlocked captivity and begin a voyage that could properly be labelled "unique in all the world". On that day, the good ship would begin a ten thousand mile cruise through the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River, and into the North Atlantic to the far reaches of polar Greenland.

Perhaps this voyage could not guarantee the 200 Coastguardsmen aboard the romantic gusto of a television commercial or the intrigue of gypsy circus life, but it did promise to be an adventure that few would forget.



Passing under the Mackinaw bridge

If asked, each sailor would relate a different interpretation of the emotions that crossed his mind as he walked the gangway for the final time that day. There was a great feeling of poignancy when the last lines were cast off and *SOUTHWIND* shuddered into motion. The crew turned and tried to follow lovers, friends and family until they became part of the crowd. Under the harbor bridge and past the circus midway they sailed, leaving Milwaukee and the things they knew as memories of the past and visions of the future.

A chapter was closed in all their lives that day and a new story was about to begin. *SOUTHWIND* was reaching out. Milwaukee and the world.



Passing Detroit and the Blue Water Bridge