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**HEART
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ONE LUCKY DOG

WRITTEN BY ROBERT S. COUZZO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATHAN COE



WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU MIX ONE-PART EXTREME ATHLETE, ONE-PART CONTRACTOR WITH ONE-PART VODKA DISTILLER? YOU GET GREG NICHOLS STRAIGHT UP.



GREG NICHOLS HAS THE LOOK OF A MAN WHO'S LIVED A GOOD LIFE—NOT CHARMED PER SAY, BUT HEALTHY. TRIM WITH SUN-KISSED BLOND HAIR AND A BRIGHT SMILE THAT SHOWS THROUGH A CROOKED GRIN, HE SITS STIRRING A MARTINI LAZILY. "BY THE END OF THE WHOLE THING I WAS WRAPPED IN SO MUCH SPORTS TAPE I LOOKED LIKE BORIS KARLOFF IN THE MUMMY," HE SAYS WITH A LAUGH.

Greg is remembering his former days as a professional skier, an impressive career that included stints on the U.S. Freestyle Ski Team and the Saab Men's Mogul Tour as well as a tenure as a freestyle ski coach in Zermatt, Switzerland. "I thought, man I'm going to get paralyzed or killed if I keep this up, so I basically hung the boards up for a while, finished my degree at the University of Vermont and moved to Nantucket." Greg hardly lives in the glory days of his past. In fact, he probably has

more epic tales than he cares to share, and it takes a little prodding (and some more vodka) to free up some gems. So you were a marathon runner, right? How many did you run? One or two? "Oh probably fifteen or sixteen," he responds casually. "When I turned forty, my times sort of plummeted. And I hung it up until last year, when I ran the New York Marathon, and that went well." Really well, actually: Greg ran a 3:24 marathon—a respectable effort for any runner, let alone a 53-year-old.



"I used to run Boston every year in the 2-40s, but then I got old," he says. And the conversation continues along those lines. Triathlon? "Yes, several." Nantucket Iron Man Team race? "Yes, did it solo... won it twice." Mountain bike? "Yes." Surf? Yup. What about tennis? "All the time." Answer after answer, Greg reveals an impressive athletic past (and present) modestly and without fanfare.

Around our second martini, we get into his life on the island. A "Secret-set" resident, Greg came to Nantucket 26 years ago to work off some money he owed his brother. "Even though I was young and broke and in debt, I just thought, this place is so cool, and I knew then that I wanted to stay here," he remembers. He was quickly swept up by the Nantucket building boom, and before long, he found himself building a Shinnecock harbor front home designed by famed postmodern architect, Robert Venturi. "He had just been awarded the Pritzker Prize for doing the National Gallery in London. The house was only approved because the HDC was so star-struck by the guy," Greg says. "I just lucked out. We met, and because I had no paper, I wrote my name and phone number on a shingle and the guy basically called me back. I had no idea who Robert Venturi was at that time." And so it was that Greg transitioned from full-time skier to successful Nantucket builder, running his own companies—first Nichols Design & Construction and now Sankaty Builders.

Greg's most recent pursuit is vodka. No, he has not fallen into the grips of alcoholism—he's a vodka purveyor. Lucky Dog Vodka—which sits chilled in our glasses at present—began as a doodle on a cocktail napkin, a wily posch Greg sketched over and over while sipping martinis at Dune. When the economy crashed in 2008 and the housing market on the island began to waver, Greg turned to the one industry bound to survive these tough financial times: the spirits business.



"When I was looking for a distilling partner, I did a major walkabout the country, and ended up connecting with these great guys in Idaho," Greg says. "Initially they weren't interested in the whole farm-to-bottle approach, but when they 'got' the Lucky Dog concept and the packaging, they were on board." Greg's Lucky Dog concept linked his passion for the mountains with that of the island, and thus his product's tagline: "Born on Nantucket and raised in the Rocky Mountains." For the many seasonal (of-age) workers who split their time between Nantucket in the summer and ski towns out west in the winter—Lucky Dog Vodka could be their unofficial liquor. Of course, Greg is quick to insist that his vodka is not just for young skiers, surfers and beach goers, but aficionados of the older sort as well. "It has been really well received by my age cohort," he says. "I am hoping it can a wide swath demographically."



One might assume that an Idaho distiller would produce potato vodka—a rising trend on the spirits scene—but as Greg informs me, “wheat vodka is actually smoother than potato vodka, which can be a little bit oily.” So it is that Lucky Dog is a winter wheat vodka made with good old Rocky Mountain meltwater from the Snake River aquifer.

Although just hitting the shelves, Lucky Dog has already won the Gold Medal at the 2011 New York World Wine & Spirits Competition and has been enthusiastically received by restaurants and package stores all over the island. Also distinguishing the product is Lucky Dog’s philanthropic pursuits: for every follower they gain on Facebook, Greg donates \$1 to the African Services Committee, a U.S. nonprofit

treating malnutrition, tuberculosis and AIDS in Ethiopia. A percentage of proceeds from bottle sales will also be given to the cause.

In the adult beverage business, image is everything: Dos Equis has its “Most Interesting Man,” Kettle One is conningly dressed “Gentleman this is vodka,” Captain Morgan has, well, Captain Morgan, and so on. Greg Nichols, by contrast, is directing his ad dollars towards charity, and letting his vodka speak for itself. Which perhaps is the way he does most things—less talk, more action. Nevertheless, if Lucky Dog did need a spokesman somewhere down the line, the pro-skier-turned-marathoner-turned-bratler-turned-distiller, Greg Nichols, would be a pretty good option.