

## ESSAY

# Sailing Rethought

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Sailing. What a magical word with visions of sun and blue water and white puffy clouds scudding across a brilliant sky while the warm breeze tosses your golden locks about fetchingly.

I've always known I would be an wonderful sailor. Don't I love the water? Aren't I immune to sunburn? Wouldn't I adore putting down anchor off some exotic desert island and dining on fresh mahi-mahi?

We live on a little river that doesn't offer a lot to sailors but we're only a few miles from Lake Michigan and I've spent many hours looking over the sailboats from Pentwater to Traverse City. The names painted on the transoms alone send me into aquatic envy. Sea Dream. Daddy's Girl. Sin Or Swim. Our Kids' Inheritance. Boys Night Out. I've always planned for my future boat to be called Superior Woman.

Their colors fascinate me. Sleek, polished teak. White with smart green trim or touches of military blue or cheerful red. There may be a little too much tradition involved and possibly a little latitude could be involved at sea. Pink and tangerine are nice. Orange with black trim and glowing skulls would be a diversion. How about gold with silver lame` trim? A little less stuffiness would make we landlubbers feel more welcome. Little shutters and flower boxes on portholes would be cute, too, with plastic tulips.

There is a reality here, too. Like, do you get seasick



on your porch swing? Are you prone to earaches when a breeze happens by? Could the sight of loose Jell-O nauseate you? Does your hair tend to look like a clove hitch knot in a stiff breeze? Do you breath well under water and are skull fractures one of your favorite pastimes?

Okay, so all these years I've dreamed about sailing and hoped and made elaborate plans. And then good fortune leaned its elusive head my way and my friends bought not only a sailboat but an entire marina. I should have paid more attention when a month later the wife half of this couple signed up for a sailing course and came home early from her lessons.

The next ominous event was when a freighter passed the marina and sank two boats tied up there. Of course one of these boats was a "stink boat," the sailor's derisive term for a motor-driven craft, so it didn't matter a lot. The other was a sailboat and of great

concern. In both cases, it was a little alarming to me.

Then Joe and Patsy invited us over to view their new boat, luckily one of the survivors of the freighter error. I was so excited and dressed in what I thought was appropriate sailing attire — white slacks, navy blue polo shirt, navy blue deck shoes and a darling little yachting cap I've been dying to own. Joe and Patsy met us in dirty jeans and sweatshirts and ball caps with John Deere logos. They were both sunburned to the color of raw beef.

At the marina we sat at a picnic table and waited for the wind to come up, and waited and waited. It was a perfect day to be on the water, sunny and warm, but only the "stink boat" people were going out. I thought about going home to get our old fishing boat, but I was trying to show a little class and not mention that this drinking wine at the pier for four hours was just not fulfilling my dreams.

Joe told stories while we

waited for some air movement, stories that didn't give me any confidence. He recounted a rough Lake Michigan crossing with another couple on board wherein the other wife sat below and cried and threw up for the entire wild trip, the waves washing over the deck and the portholes totally under water.

Patsy said she stayed at the helm out of some misguided sense of togetherness, listening to Joe scream orders at her while she dug holes in her palms with her fingernails and prayed that God was a yachtsman at heart. The only reason she wasn't vomiting, she said, was that her teeth were clenched shut for the next three days.

After hearing this, we were supposed to be very anxious for the wind to come up and we decided to sit on the boat to wait at least. By then, my white pants had spots of gull droppings and my hair was flattened with sweat under the cunning hat. I was also a little tipsy,

the wake from the gas burners passing cheerfully by making me a little light-headed.

I was in no condition to walk the plank. They called it a dock, but I know it wasn't any more than four inches wide and at least 10 feet above the water and six feet higher than the boat and was surely going to lead to a dunking. I thought longingly of wading out to our old fishing boat and climbing up over the side. I don't think sailors allow you to call the perimeter of a boat a "side." It has some smug, seaworthy name.

I stood at the safe end of the dock and looked at the boat lolling there in the burning sun. Sailboats are intrinsically lazy. They don't want to do any of the work themselves. I eyed the distance to the water where some bloated dead fish eyed me with bulging eyes. I thought about how if I made it the length of those skinny boards I wasn't sure how to get down into the boat gracefully without splitting my pretty pants.

Then I thought of how bad our old boat must feel that we were spurning her loyalty, of the days she had chugged us out to cool, clean water even when the wind wasn't up.

Maybe sailing wasn't what I'd dreamed of at all. I couldn't wait to get home and get into my cut-offs and T-shirt and run out in my bare feet and hug that old stink boat tub.

I'm not sure if Joe and Patsy ever did get out on the water that day.

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