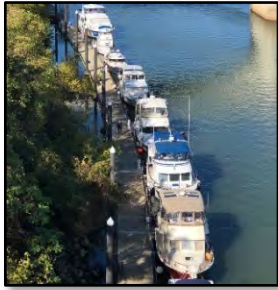




Ladies on the Loop



A collection of 35 short stories offering guidance, humor, and reflection from women who have traveled America's Great Loop



Introduction by Susan Costa on the Lucky Me
Chapter Authors

- Pat Amidon • Penny Battles • Deborah Bowles
- Sarah Bowlin • Reenie Boyer • Alyse Caldwell
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- Barbara Morrow • Susan Pellett • Lesley Poole
- Barbara J. Reinken • Debbie Russell • Cindy Scheer
- April Smith • Laurie Sullivan • Jodi Symes
- Mary Tobin • Nancy Turk • Sarah Vince • Mary Walker
- Lori Welch • Wendy Wilson



TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author / Boat Name</i>	<i>Page</i>
1	Looper Best Friend	Lesley Poole on Tyre-less	5
2	Creativity on the Loop	Nancy Turk on TxAu	10
3	Home for the Holidays ...	Alyse Caldwell on Sandy Hook	15
4	There's No Crying ...	Jodi Symes on Done Diggin'	20
5	Being Prepared	Penny Battles on Southern Cross	26
6	Are You Sure??	Carol McDonough on Way 2 Much	30
7	American History on the ...	Theresa Jo Gaffney on The Home Office	34
8	Whose Idea Was This?	Mary Tobin on yes dear ...	44
9	Foodies on the Loop!	April Smith on One Eye Dog	51
10	Cat Tales, Dog Tails & ...	Debbie Russell on Gypsies Palace	58
11	Great Loop with Patrick	Lori Welch on Sirius	66
12	Life-Saving Loop	Wendy Wilson/Wilson's on the Water	79
13	Chance Encounters	Julia Erben on Erben Renewal	85
14	Not All Sunsets & Chardonnay	Sarah Bowlin on Light & Salty	91
15	Stepping out on F.A.I.T.H.	Julie Johnson on F.A.I.T.H.	99
16	The Gulf of Mexico Crossing	Mary Walker on Pegasus	107
17	Couple Issues on the Loop	Anonymous	111
18	Looper Community to the ...	Pat Amidon on Velomer	118
19	Are You Crazy?	Cindy Scheer on Aquaman	127
20	We Figured It Out	Barbara Morrow on The Blessing	137
21	Baby Boat – Big Adventure	Sarah Vince on In-Vince-ible	145
22	What's Your name?	Reenie Boyer on Thistle	149

Continued on next page - ->

23	Lake O and Beyond	Laurie Edgerly on Oar Knot	154
24	Dirty Laundry, a Fresh ...	Linda McCormick on Moon Dance IV	162
25	Looping on the “Little Boat”	Laurie Sullivan on Laurie Jean	165
26	Obstacles & Opportunities	Amy Deutl on Selah Way	168
27	Undefeated	Susan Pellett on SuzyQ/Allons-y	176
28	Illinois Waterway Adventure	Brenda Howrey on B-Side	179
29	The Gulf of Mexico is FLAT!	Robin McVey on The Lower Place	190
30	Side Trip Sampler ...	Barb H. Malden on RioMarLago	194
31	Let’s go to the Bahamas	Susan Costa on Lucky Me	203
32	Documenting Your Great ...	Rev Crouse on Here’s To Us	210
33	From Here to There & ...	Deborah Bowles on Mountain Wave	216
34	Safely Cruising the Loop	Barbara J. Reinken on Hallelujah	226
35	Best Day Ever – Ottawa	Celeste Freeman on God’s Grace	236

Thank You & Acknowledgments

The authors in this book range from new Loopers to seasoned Pros. A few have even traveled the Great Loop twice! **Ladies on the Loop** would never have been possible if not for the many special women who shared their personal stories.

Special appreciation is offered to AGLCA (America’s Great Loop Cruisers’ Association) and Kim Russo, the Executive Director of AGLCA. Kim and the staff of AGLCA are constantly there to offer amazing programs, encouragement, and assistance.

Supporting the Great Loop membership every step of the way, are the dedicated AGLCA Harbor Hosts, Sponsors, Member Marinas, and Vendors. A big heart-felt thank you for their support and commitment to the Looper community!

Introduction & Acknowledgments

By Susan Costa on the *Lucky Me*



With great pride, the *Lucky Me* crossed her wake and finished the Great Loop in Stuart, Florida, on June 1, 2020. After 18 months and almost 7,000 miles, it was now time to get moving on an idea for a book I had been kicking around.

From the very beginning, **Ladies on the Loop** was never intended to be a book I wrote. It was always to be a collection of stories by ladies that have traveled the Great Loop. I just knew “OUR” book was going to be this amazing compilation of stories, that is, as long as I could get a bunch of other Looper Ladies to sign on to author a chapter. It’s one thing to talk about your journey in a small group, but would the girls want to put in writing their experiences for everyone to read?

So, in early summer, I posted on the AGLCA (*America's Great Loop Cruisers' Association - greatloop.org*) member forum a message asking if any Looper Ladies would like to be part of a free e-book to be called **Ladies on the Loop**. My goal was to find at least 15 authors and guess what happened? Within 24 hours I had over 30 ladies wanting to share their stories.

Who are the Ladies of the Loop? We are Captains, First Mates, Admirals, Wives, Partners, Cooks and at times even hired Crew. On the Loop, it doesn’t matter if you are young or old, rich or on a budget, newly boating or an expert – we are all in this together and equal. And these women often had the most interesting stories; how they started the Loop, overcoming sickness and fears, concerns about leaving family behind, finding incredible joy along the journey, personal growth, and of course, the friendships they made.

There is a special bond that Looping Ladies establish as we chat about our first few locks, that tricky Gulf Crossing, the miles dodging trees and deadheads on the Mississippi River, and the joy of passing the Statue of Liberty. Conversations over docktails and pot-luck dinners might include stories about how we started the Loop and why, boating tips, hobbies, or where we plan to visit next.

But it's the unique bond established over shared experiences that often was the beginning of deep female friendships being formed. For many, these friendships resulted in a Looper support group that offered advice and words of encouragement when you had a tough day, or "congratulations" when you reached a milestone.

Ask any gold Looper – male or female, and most will agree that friendships made on the Loop last long after you finish. Could I have done the Loop without my many Looper friends? Sure, but what fun would that have been?

Forever Looping,

Susan Costa

Lucky Me – Gold Looper 2020

P.S.

If you are reading this book as a future Looper, please join the AGLCA (*America's Great Loop Cruisers' Association - greatloop.org*), follow the Great Loop page on Facebook, and reach out to some of the Loopers in this book for support. It truly is the "Adventure of a Lifetime"!



Chapter 1

Looper Best Friend!

By Lesley Poole

Tyre-less 45' Baja

Gold Looper – 2018

On a perfect mid-September morning in 2017, we left Chicago’s DuSable Harbor and headed through the glass and steel canyons of downtown Chicago. By then, we were two months into our Great Loop adventure. Little did I know that by the time the day was over, I would meet my Looper BFF! We had greatly anticipated transiting Chicago, and it was as amazing as we had hoped, but barely an hour into our trip we found ourselves in the decidedly industrial Ship and Sanitary Canal.



I took a photo of a boat ahead of us – “Thistle” – thinking it looked like a fellow Looper boat. Sure enough, after experiencing our first commercial locks and our first “tows” we were happy to encounter a number of fellow Loopers tied at the Joliet wall – including Greg and Reenie Boyer on *Thistle*.

Jim and I had an ill-conceived plan to bike the five miles to the NASCAR race the next day. Reenie had much better information and steered us to a shuttle bus that went to the racetrack from the train station a couple of blocks from our boat. In retrospect, she probably saved our lives that day – sparing us both a dodgy neighborhood and narrow roads filled with non-bike-friendly race traffic. As we later learned, Reenie always seems to know the

cool places to visit and things to do (or not do, in this case) everywhere we traveled.

We were at peak Looper season, so there were quite a bunch of us heading down the rivers together – the folks we met over the next couple of weeks became our closest friends of the trip.

Reenie and I really bonded in Paducah, KY, where we were lucky enough to arrive in the middle of their big street festival, "BBQ on the River". We visited the National Quilt Museum together – a can't-miss attraction that both Greg and Jim were happy (even determined) to miss. Then we all had fun together (along with many other Loopers) at Green Turtle Bay, where everyone rested for a few days after conquering the Mississippi and the Ohio Rivers, and where we had our first blown engine.

Due to a few weeks of engine repairs, we had to lag behind while everyone else continued down the Tenn-Tom. But we rejoined our buddies (us in a rental car and staying in a motel) at the Fall Rendezvous at Joe Wheeler Park. From there, Greg and Reenie were making tracks to Key West, where they had a two-month reservation starting in early December.

It took a while, but we finally caught up with *Thistle* in Key West in mid-January. We managed to snag a slip for two weeks at A&B Marina, right next to Galleon where *Thistle* was docked in the central part of Key West – a lively spot! Reenie was the social convenor of a large and fun group of Loopers. Reenie is a gracious, creative, and welcoming hostess who makes the best appetizers.

On our first night there it was a happy reunion where we learned an important rule of surviving Key West – partake in Happy Hour or dinner but not both! Reenie organized several Looper potluck dinners as well as events such as jewelry-making class and an amazing 60th birthday bash for Greg at a cooking school. While our small group of ladies was making jewelry, the guys went to a blues festival – we joined up later at a wine bar where some very expensive wine was enjoyed by all (especially the server, who somehow got double-tipped).



It was that week that Reenie did something that will always seem to me to be the most amazing gesture – she had a fresh lei flown in for me from Hawaii (their adopted home state). No special occasion – just a celebration of our friendship.

Even after *Tyre-less* had to relocate to Stock Island Marina (as we did not have the foresight to make a longer reservation in Key West), we took the shuttle bus most days into town (about 5 miles) to be with our friends. And one day a bunch of them dinghied over to see us!

Our Key West idyll over, we joined up again in Marathon for the famous Loooper Sunset Celebration. From there our paths diverged – we headed to the Bahamas for a few weeks and Greg and Reenie took a break to head to Europe, where Greg was in an international water polo tournament – we learned he is an Olympic medalist in water polo!

By this time, Reenie and I were keeping in close touch. *Tyre-less* and crew were delayed in Charleston for several weeks having our second engine rebuilt but we reunited for a couple of days when *Thistle* passed us again!

Our next rendezvous in our game of nautical hopscotch was in Baltimore for one fabulous evening. From the Chesapeake, *Tyre-less* had to hustle north to make sure we were out of the US by the time our one-year cruising permit expired – *Thistle's* cruising pace was more leisurely.

Jim and I spent a few days at Great Kills in Staten Island, which was our base camp for exploring New York City. We were sad to miss *Thistle* crossing her

wake at the Statue of Liberty, but we promised to meet again before the end of the cruising season when we both planned to store our boats at Winter Harbor at Brewerton, NY on the Erie Canal.

We crossed our wake at Trenton, Ontario on September 19. Due to a blown turbocharger that had slowed us down since Montreal, we decided to end our Loop there, instead of returning to our home port of Toronto. A few days later, Jim single-handed *Tyre-less* across Lake Ontario to Oswego and then through the Oswego and Erie Canals to Winter Harbor. I met him with our truck, then we set off to find Greg and Reenie, who were by then cruising the western part of the canal. We met them at the lock in Pittsford, NY where we had a fine celebratory evening that ended with us crashing in *Thistle's* guest quarters.



A few weeks later, Jim and I moved to our new home in Gananoque, ON, and spent the winter getting settled in and dealing with post-Loop letdown. All the while, Reenie and I kept in touch. She is the “Queen of the Emojis” in our regular text messages – always lifting my spirits, even if there isn’t much news to share.

Due to high water and completion of boat repairs, the start of our 2019 boating season was delayed, but on the first weekend in July, we finally met up with Greg and Reenie in Brewerton to retrieve our respective boats. Our original plan to cruise together down the St. Lawrence River to Montreal ran into some scheduling challenges due to our delayed start, but we did some great cruising together in our new home waters of the Thousand Islands and on the Rideau Canal. Or mostly together, at least – Reenie and Greg are pretty spontaneous so sometimes we ended up heading in different directions! Reenie and Greg did make it to Montreal and

eventually back to Winter Harbor. Once *Thistle* was put to bed, we met up one last time in Clayton, NY for a farewell dinner.

But our Looper friendship is far from over! Life got in the way of us visiting Hawaii this winter; now Covid-19 is making it difficult for Greg and Reenie to leave Hawaii. Once things get back to “normal” *Thistle* will belong to some lucky new Loopers. Through thick and thin, including consoling each other on the death of our fathers last year, Reenie and I are still in touch several times a week. Right now, we’re in the planning stages of a trip to Europe in 2021 where we’ll rent a boat together for some river cruising for a week or two, probably in France.

Vive le Loop! And Reenie, my Looper Best Friend Forever.





Chapter 2

Creativity on the Loop

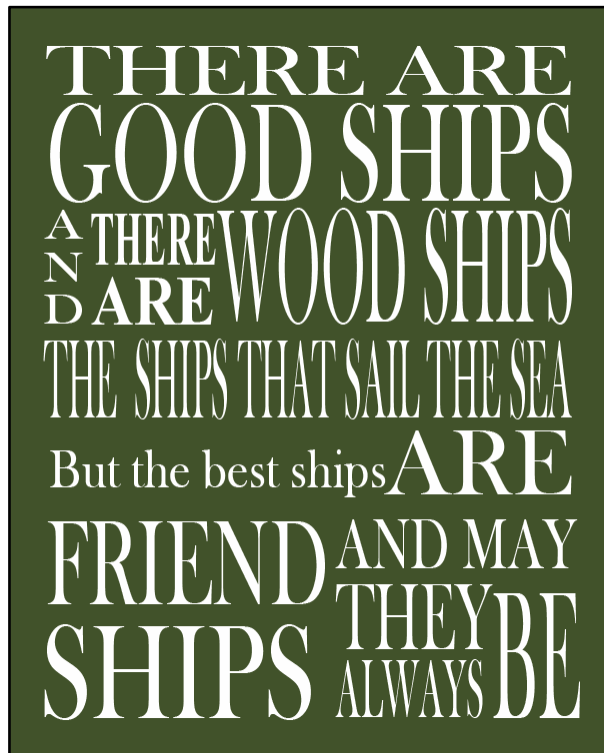
By Nancy Tinsley
Turk
TxAu (Texas Gold)
40' Trojan Motor
Yacht
Gold Looper – 2019

Before we departed on the Loop, my mother said to me, "You are going to be bored within three weeks." While I was excited to start the journey, I admit I was worried about how much I would enjoy an entire year living on a boat. What would I do to keep myself interested and to exercise my creative brain? This chapter outlines some of the things that helped me do just that.

Do you enjoy stories? Tell it like it is! As many Loopers do, I started our blog on WordPress before we left. The Captain envisioned the blog would report on our miles and destinations with an update on fuel economy. Numbers? BORING! I like pretty pictures and fun stories! So, I became a blog writer for the first time. At the end of each day, I'd sit at the table and write up our "True Looper Life Stories" on the laptop. I'd detail the challenges and learnings of the day. Not just the facts but the emotions and jokes too.

Docktails provided lots of entertaining stories and I'd type them in. If it was interesting to me, I assumed others would enjoy it. Then I'd paste in a photo or two and publish them to the blog. When I was lazy about writing or did not have internet access, I kept a notebook with dates and themes so the blog would not get too far behind. The Captain would read them before publishing and have his own, often hilarious spin.

Your readers want to know how the trip is REALLY going. Head broken? Have to pee in a red solo cup? Anchor broke loose and wind shoved you into the rocks? I shared the good, the bad, and even the ugly stuff. I also wrote some raunchy poetry and smart-aleck songs. Once we had a songwriting contest with our buddy boats - changing the words to songs we all knew - to sing about our cruise adventures through Canada. Did you know there is a new Canadian National Anthem? I wrote the words to it! (smile) At dinner that night in a local restaurant we were reprimanded for being too loud as we shared our final verses - oops. Such great memories!



Oh, and you know that "Best ships are friendships" toast? We had a challenge with our buddy boats to re-write the words. I'm pretty sure I won that contest. But I'll let you be the judge - which Looper toast is best?

#1: There are leaky ships and stinky ships and docktails on the sea. But the best ships are friendships with drunken folks like me! ~ Done Diggin'

#2: Through shallow channels, narrow rivers and lakes that are deep and wide, we have no fear of travel with these friends by our side! ~ Lucky Me

#3: We are Looper boats with dinghy

floats, over 6,000 miles to see. But the best of these trips are the awesome friendships and grateful we'll always be! ~ TxAu

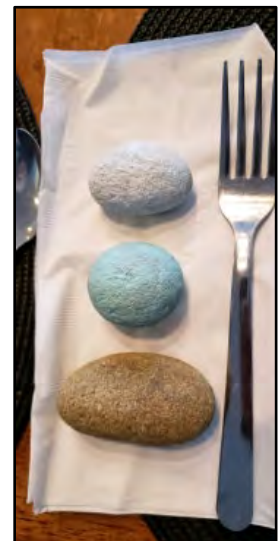
If writing is not your thing, just think of the things that appeal to you and plan how to enjoy them. A few examples...

Are you a reader? Hours of entertainment at your fingertips! I have always been a reader so I brought a stash of books along. I used BookBub to download other books (often for free!) when we had internet access. I would Google "library near me" and ride my bike or walk there to enjoy a free afternoon looking through the stacks and reading the magazines. It's a great way to find some alone time! You will discover that many of the marinas have small "take a book/leave a book" libraries. These were cool since many books are about the local area. A few of us Looper Ladies shared our blog links and could read each other's entries as we cruised along together. Interesting! You can find the blog links on the AGLCA site too!

Do you enjoy cooking? Have fun in the galley! There are limitations no doubt, but it provides an interesting challenge. I often spent time on the bridge planning our next meal. What can I make if I have just canned chicken, onion, celery, carrots, and raisins? Chicken salad on crackers! A leftover packet of chick-filet sauce? Add it! Study up on some creative docktails snacks and you will be very popular. The farmer's markets along the way help. I bought a basil plant, watered it with river water, and it grew huge. Loopers Ladies would stop by for a cutting. There were times we had a "Featured Beverage" recipe for the evening's docktails. Got salted caramel Tennessee Whiskey? Know the Bushwacker recipe? We used our grill a *LOT* and yet shamefully we ate out often too! Finding good restaurants is so much fun, especially with other Loopers.

Are you a collector? Before the Loop, I enjoyed shopping at Goodwill with girlfriends. How could I possibly feed that habit? Yes, I did find quite a few thrift shops along the Loop. Although, most of the time you will shop at Walmart. There were times I'd walk the marina area looking for found objects of interest. You would be shocked at what I found hanging around. "I think I'll string up these crab floats that washed up on Tangier Island."

Before we arrived for family Easter at my parents in North Carolina, I started searching for "Easter egg" shaped rocks. Why not? I painted them in pastel colors (Dollar Store paint) and used



them for table decorations. There was some resistance from the Captain about carrying rocks on the boat. I bargained my way out of that one by donating books to a local thrift shop. Sometimes you have to fight for your creative space and happiness!

Photography? Painting? All along the route, I took photos. I was lucky to have a good camera on my phone that allowed me to correct and crop. Many of them I planned to make into landscape paintings. There are so many incredible sunsets and the various colors of the water are outstanding. I really wanted to paint. I had packed my painting supplies and a stash of small flat panel canvases. I did not know for sure how the process would work. Painting on a boat? Well, I did a few actual paintings. I also enjoyed touring local galleries and the artists' studios in various towns along the way. A few times I got to talk with the artists themselves. What a treat for me!



One day we were holed up during a storm and The Captain asked, "Why don't you paint us a DOCKTAILS sign?" Great idea! We had never seen one. We could hang it out at every docktails gathering. Is it spelled DockTAILS or DockTALES? Hmm. The next morning the captain is walking around the dilapidated marina scouring for a crusty old board for me to paint on. Then a piece of scrap rope, drill some holes. . . and wouldn't you know it? Other Loopers wanted one too. That kept me creatively busy!

And yet, there were times I would sit on the bridge staring at the water going by (for hours!) and feel a bit bored. But then I'd talk to other Loopers and see what they were doing all day. That's what friends are for.

One Looper couple enjoyed finding opportunities to give back to the communities. Some Loopers would make up creative games to play at Docktails. A woman I became good friends with weaved really beautiful baskets onboard. Some were

listening to books on tape together as they cruised along. Others made playlists of songs on Spotify. Heading into New York City? There's a playlist for that. We met history buffs that did every historical tour they could find. There are a lot of incredible historic forts, museums, and sites along the Loop. One lady loved organizing the docktail parties, pot lucks, and get-togethers. Another couple toured almost every winery and brewery. There is some fairly bad wine out there but also some amazing local favorites. Some Loopers at each stop were looking for the bike trails or the nearest golf courses.

Yes, you can exercise your brain and explore your creativity while enjoying America's Great Loop!

What appeals to you? Make it your own journey.

Nancy (Tinsley) Turk, Tinsleyturk@outlook.com
Email me if you want a PDF of my Blog.



Chapter 3

Home for the Holidays ...

By Captain Alyse Caldwell

Sandy Hook

44' Gulfstar Motor Cruiser

Looper In Progress

Except for all the special feasting, my husband Chris is really “Bah Humbug!” about the holidays. So, move us aboard our 44-foot trawler full-time and what’s a girl to do?

As full-time cruisers, we had the holiday season all wrapped up – literally before Halloween. Since we weren’t ever quite sure how far we’d be from a post office in December, it was simpler to find local treasures for family along the waterways throughout the year. We’d wrap these gifts in old charts for a bit of a nautical theme and ship them from small towns along the ICW. By the time the Holiday season was really upon us we could enjoy swinging on the hook in the Florida Keys and meeting snowbirds in various sized vessels who also escaped the frigid north winds.

On Christmas Eve, wherever we landed, I would persuade Chris to hop in our dinghy with me and go caroling in the anchorage. Sporting antlers with bells or red Santa hats, sometimes we recruited a small chorus of dinghies from nearby boats that usually ended up more of a floating party than a songfest. But everyone who politely listened to our feeble attempt at warbling received a stocking stuffer. As payment for the auditory assault, hotel-sized shampoo and soap are big hits with the smaller boats who dinghy ashore to shower.

If you have room for a small tree, then be sure your ornaments are boat-proof. Unless you are sequestered in a super protected marina, almost all boat trees take a tumble at least once or twice from the wake of a go-fast boat. Wooden or paper ornaments survive the crash with much more grace than your great grandma's antique heirlooms. Battery operated candles are the new rage and are quite realistic as a much safer option on a boat. One year I created an art deco tree with a dead branch, white paint, a small string of lights, and oyster shells. Yes, everything you ever needed to learn in life you really did learn in kindergarten, but having a cruiser's fix-it mentality doesn't hurt.

Mmmm...What's for dinner?

Because our first holiday aboard taught us that our tiny galley oven could only hold a 12 lb. turkey, our Christmas Turducken got really creative. A Turducken is a de-boned turkey stuffed with a de-boned duck, stuffed with a de-boned chicken. Really ... in a boat galley. We discovered that our boat-sized oven couldn't fit anything that large so each bird was the smallest we could find and the chicken got demoted to a quail. Try deboning something smaller than a seagull and imagine the salty % @ ! # words you'll invent. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Coming from New Orleans, holidays are all about the food. Then again, everything in New Orleans is all about the food so first, you must know what makes a holiday a holiday *for you*. Then adapt your menu when you realize how cooking aboard is different than being ashore. We've met cruisers who believe pizza and ice cream creates the most wonderful Christmas dinner and you can't convince them otherwise. When you consider that most boat refrigerators can't keep ice cream frozen solid, then you might agree. Pass the whipped cream!

More of a traditionalist may substitute a turkey breast if you don't have the room for leftovers from an entire bird. Or break totally with convention and go with our favorite: surf and turf which is a much less expensive undertaking when you go native. Taking on the local *surf* option, you can substitute Georgia shrimp, Chesapeake Bay steamed crabs, or even Florida grouper for lobster, depending on your location. Season with some Old Bay or Tony Chachere's and you have a feast

just using your grill or boiling some water on your stovetop for a quick *surf* steamer. Add a green salad and crisp veggies and you are in heaven!

Near many seaside towns, we find weekly farmer's markets which sometimes include seafood caught by local fishermen in addition to the expected fresh fruits and veggies. Getting off the boat and stretching our legs is a bonus as our 44-foot *home* can get a bit cozy by the time the cooler holiday season rolls around.

Decorate your Table

One of the many creature comforts we have enjoyed aboard our boat is our Christmas china. Yes, we have china and crystal stowed away for special celebrations... and in the 25 years since we first moved aboard, we broke fewer fragile items than we *ever* did living on land. Now, as dirt dwellers, we have further to reach when moving items from cupboard to the table and I swear the all too convenient dishwasher has *teeth* to grind away on our delicate glassware. Use your beer can koozies to surround fine wine glasses and the beer bottle koozies to protect your champagne flutes. Simply placing bubble wrap layered in between your china plates works wonders to keep the plates from chipping when you are in rough seas. In 1995 we started with service for 12 of our everyday china, thinking we would break some along the way, 25 years later and we can still serve 12 for dinner. But all you really need is enough for your crew.

Red cloth napkins certainly compliment the colors of the season and dress up our table for two... or twelve, if you invite other boat orphans as we often refer to those of us without our families aboard. The bonus of having red napkins is that they work for Valentine's day, fourth of July, Memorial Day, and just about any other time you want to feel less like you are camping when you dine aboard.

Some of the harbors we've called home for the holidays have given us incredible memories. The year we were still in Charleston with ice on our decks made us realize that *brrrr!* we needed to be further south. When your wardrobe is limited you tend to follow the sun. In Fernandina Beach, Florida, we really learned to appreciate our tiny galley and the luxury of a generator as we meandered around

the anchorage checking our depths. The aroma of roasted turkey, oyster stuffing, and candied yams danced in our wake as cruisers popped out of their cabins to see what was creating memories of a home-cooked meal. Most of our boat neighbors were either reheating something in the microwave or having sandwiches on that chilly holiday after a long day on the water. Once anchored, we invited a few new friends to share the feast.

Home is where the heart is ... or where your boat is ... Happy Holidays!

Have a question? Alyse@CaptainChrisYachtServices.com Our website is filled with tips for the new cruiser as well as a few easy-peasy galley recipes too.

<https://www.captainchrisyachtservices.com/category/galley-recipes/>

No-Bake Rum Balls

With the holidays in mind, I will share my Mother's tried and true recipe for the most wonderful sweets that you don't have to bake, heat, or otherwise have any culinary skill to create. Right up my alley!

2 cups graham cracker crumbs
2 cups crunched Oreo cookies
1 cup powdered sugar*
1/8 tsp salt
1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans)
1.5 Tbsp honey or syrup
1/2 cup rum

Set aside a bit more powdered sugar or powdered cocoa to coat the rum balls. Just roll 'em around in it.

Mix all ingredients together, *except the rum*, in a bowl with your hands. Gradually add rum, mixing until the ingredients hold together. Then just add more rum a few drops at a time. Roll into 1-inch balls then roll in powdered sugar or powdered cocoa. Set on waxed paper and cover inside a lidded box. Store at room temperature. Even a shoebox will do if you don't have an airtight box. The rum evaporates quicker if it's not airtight. Uh-oh!

GulfStar Gazpacho

This recipe makes a lot so have a large no-spill container with a lid to store it in. Trust me, you'll want to make this much so you can serve your guests and still have leftovers. It's a bit messy but no cooking is involved!

3 Tbsp Olive Oil
1 Garlic Clove - smashed
8 saltine crackers crumbs
2 cups beef bouillon
1 chopped onion
3 celery stalks - chopped
4 sprigs parsley - chopped
6 sprigs watercress - chopped
2 cups tomato juice
2 Tbsp lemon juice
1/4 tsp pepper
a few shakes of Crystal hot sauce
1 large chopped tomato
1 cucumber - peeled and chopped*

*Notice a theme here? Chop everything FINELY if you don't have a food processor or blender.

Start by setting aside the garlic and olive oil in a small dish to meld the flavors. Then in your blender (or by hand with a plastic baggie and rolling pin) crunch up your saltines then pour in bullion, add onions, celery, parsley, and watercress.

Add oil and garlic to blender mix (remove garlic if you're not afraid of Vampires). Then add everything but the chopped tomatoes and cucumbers and give the blender a whirl. Pour liquid into lidded containers and refrigerate for at least 4 hours. Overnight works too.

When ready to serve, scoop chopped tomatoes and cucumbers into soup bowls and pour gazpacho over fresh veggies. Be really decadent and top with a dollop of sour cream. Yummy on a hot day and filling enough to be a meal with some crusty French bread.



Chapter 4

There's No Crying on The Flybridge By Jodi Symes Done Diggin' 43' Lagoon Powercat Gold Looper – 2019

Yes, my Captain actually said that to me one morning on the Alligator River in the ICW in Virginia, having ventured out to try and “beat” an oncoming thunderstorm. HA! You don't beat a storm! Thus, my tears.

So, how in the world did I get myself in this position? Believe me, I'd asked myself that a few times at that point, and I guess it all goes back to the beginning.

This trip was a bucket list item for my husband, Dan. Our “love story” has had kind of a winding road; we dated way back in the '80s, went our separate ways, and reunited in 2007. As our relationship was getting more serious he'd tell me that someday he was going to sell everything, buy a boat, and go on this epic trip called *The Great Loop*. I'd smile and nod and say that sounded nice. As time went on though, it became clear to me that he wasn't kidding! This guy was going to buy a boat and do this trip, and he wanted me to go with him. Yikes!!! I had never really done any boating in my life, and he hadn't done much either, but in 2009 we bought an old Carver with twin engines and named her Frog Lane, the name of the restaurant where we first met.



Good old Frog Lane – she had twin engines, one of which always failed when we were docking – and we soon learned THAT’s why they call it a spectator sport ☺! Though we never went far in that old boat, we decided we did like boating and the dream lived on while we moved on in life. We got married in 2011 and took the old Carver out whenever weather and time allowed and started counting the days until retirement.



This is a cute photo of us way back in the '80s... little did we know how many more pictures of us on a boat we'd take!

As life would have it, we had a BIG bump in the road along the way. Dan had been diagnosed with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma in 2012 and the doctors recommended “watchful waiting” which really meant do nothing but get scans from time to time. The diagnosis was always in the back of our minds, but he’s a really healthy, really strong, really STUBBORN guy ☺ and he seemed fine – until he didn’t.

In 2015, scans showed the cancer had progressed to what was called Diffuse Large B Cell Lymphoma. Then his battle with this beast began. Two different rounds of



chemo and an attempt at stem cell transplant later, he was just getting sicker, nothing was working. In the Spring of 2016, the oncologist at Tufts said we were out of options. It had gotten to the point that I was pushing him in a wheelchair to his appointments and we both had to take leaves of absence from work; my full-time job became taking care of him. Through the grace of God, we were referred to a team at MGH that was working with some very promising clinical trials and Dan received CAR-T cell therapy in September; basically, his T cells were collected, genetically re-engineered, and replaced into his body in an attempt to attack the cancer cells

and put him into remission. Thank God, it worked. He has been in 100% remission since October of 2016.

Even chemo and exhaustion couldn't stop my Captain from planning! Needless to say, boat shopping had paused while he was sick, but as soon as he was better, it began in earnest and we bought our Loop Boat, a 43' Lagoon Power Catamaran and we named her "Done Diggin' " because his days of building houses were over!

We planned to start our Loop in Spring of 2018, but the boat wasn't ready (who couldn't write a whole chapter on boat delays!?!), so we moved on to Plan B. This meant we left home in September of 2018 to travel down the East Coast from Massachusetts to Florida where we spent the Winter. It also meant an extra six months on the boat and away from home and family, which was difficult for me. I was pretty anxious when we left home – I worried about EVERYTHING – waves, weather, locking, docking, and anchoring for starters, but also homesickness, loneliness, and health issues! I was nervous every day for the first two months, always afraid something was going to break down and we'd be stuck out in the water all alone – it was Fall and we were in New England so we weren't around any Loopers at that point.

Our first days were all in the ocean! Big water every day until we got to New York and then we had to wait for weather for the Jersey Coast. As we moved further south and the days got warmer and the dolphins started swimming alongside us, something happened. I remember literally thinking "it's OK to enjoy this" and I started to relax.



Slow but sure, I built myself a new “toolbox” and worked at filling it with tools to make me more comfortable. My tools look something like this:

◆ When we first bought our boat in Florida, we hired a Captain to help us for the first few days. I think he sensed I was nervous about boating and he asked me whether I wanted to be a passenger on my own boat, or if I wanted to actively participate. He then started teaching me how to properly throw a line (I really didn't know!), call bridges and other boats on the VHF, and even how to check the fluids each morning before launch. Although I only checked the fluids that first day ☺, I decided that I wanted to be “all in.” Danny encouraged me to do as much as I was comfortable with and soon, I was even able to pilot the boat for him to have a break or to check the engine. At first, I would have white knuckles and be as close to the chart as I could to make sure we were on track, but by the middle of our trip, I got better. I still haven't docked the boat; I need to learn to do that still!

◆ One thing that really helped was to think of each day as just “a ride on the boat”. We had a plan, of course, but I was more comfortable with the “one day at a time”. The 5000+ mile Loop was overwhelming to me at first, but I knew I could handle “today”.

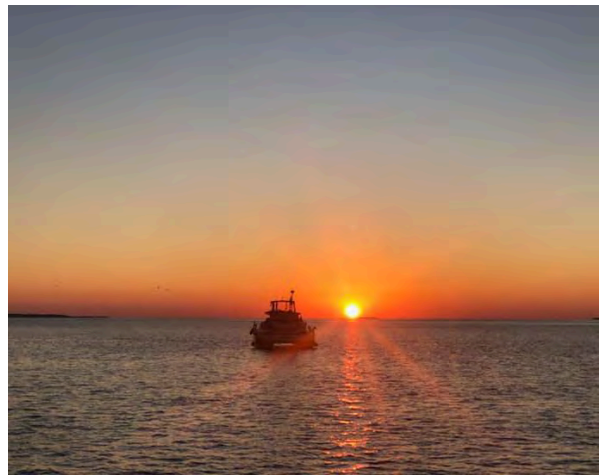
◆ We stuck to a go/no-go decision-making rule that we learned about at an AGLCA Rendezvous – the rule is it takes two yeses and one no. If we both didn't agree on the conditions, we didn't go out that day. I definitely made some “no” calls at the beginning of the trip that were too conservative, and we both made a “yes” call we regretted, luckily with no consequences, later in the trip.

◆ I paid attention – maybe too much attention – to sounds, smells and the “feel” of the boat; the things that made me panic in the beginning became much

more routine as time went on. We learned that you really need two sets of eyes and ears on the bridge and I provided many “gentle” reminders as to which side the red should be on!! We relaxed, but didn’t get lazy!

◆ I missed my kids and especially my granddaughter like crazy; she was not quite two years old when we left and 4 ½ when we returned! We had to travel home every six months for doctors’ appointments and we threw in a couple of extra trips along the way which helped with my homesickness. FaceTime helped and there were LOTS of calls and texts to my sister and my best friend. Home was never really as far away as I thought it would be.

◆ Each day I logged our departure time, arrival time, weather and miles traveled and a little bit about how I’d felt about the day. Pretty soon, I started turning these logs into my blog, www.donedigindiaries.blog, which became a great source of therapy for me! Many Looper blogs have a history of the waterways and places visited and lots of facts and statistics, but mine was much more personal, and even at the beginning, re-reading it became a source of pride. I was learning and I was growing as a first mate! I became a real boater!



Loopers talk about buddy boats and the great people you meet on the trip all the time. We went to a few rendezvous and I honestly thought it was a bit cliché, I heard it so much. But it’s true. We met so many fun, interesting and helpful Loopers, and in June of 2019 on the Erie Canal, we met **OUR LOOPER BUDDY BOATS!!**



We traveled with several boats for much of the trip, but with some of them for the bulk of the trip. The crews of the Lucky Me, Laurie Jean, and TxAu will be lifelong friends. We hope to spend time with all of them along with Aquaman and Seas Today in the winter going forward. The people, conversations, boat rides, docktails, and lots of memories truly became the most important tools in my survival toolbox. I literally couldn't have done it without them.

We just got home from this trip a few weeks ago, and it's hard to believe it all happened. I love looking back at the pictures and remembering our adventures. Friends and family have marveled at our story and called me "strong" but I didn't feel that way every day - all day on this trip, that's for sure! But looking back I am proud of what Danny and I accomplished as a couple and of what I accomplished personally.

In many ways, I think I started building my toolbox a very long time ago, the Great Loop just helped me pick out the right ones at the right time! To be honest, I did cry a time or two after that day in the thunderstorm, but in my heart, I knew we would be okay. And we are.





Chapter 5 Being Prepared By Penny Battles Southern Cross 61' Ocean Alexander Gold Looper – 2019

First things first, I firmly believe you have to be prepared in all you embark on doing because you just never know what's around the next corner in life. I adopted this philosophy early on in my own life (I'll get into that as part of this chapter) and certainly used this philosophy continuously while doing the Loop.

One of the things people said to us at the very beginning was “why such a big boat for the Loop?” If we heard it once, we heard it a hundred times, “that's a pretty big boat to be doing the Loop in”. And yes, it is on the larger side at 61' length overall (LOA), but when Dave and I searched for our boat, we knew it would be our home for the next 10+ years, or until we were physically unable to handle the boating life! (We Loopers, in fact, all boaters, know that cruising & living aboard is not all Sunshine and Cocktail parties, but alas that is a story for another book).

So, suffice it to say, for us, living space was most important. And another truism in boating, everything regarding style/class/size, etc., is a compromise. Going bigger in boat size has its own compromises just as going smaller. So, for lifestyle purposes beyond just doing the Loop, we opted to go with a larger boat and live aboard full time. We sold our home in Tampa, unloaded everything that

did not fit onboard (no storage unit!), grabbed our dog Ariel and we moved aboard full time in May 2018.

We then spent the next 10 months getting ourselves prepared for the Loop! Dave is retired Navy and has been on the water his entire life. Me on the other hand ... I had very little experience on the water but compensated my lack of experience with tremendous excitement for the adventure of just being on the boat every single day. Previously we did own a 28' Sea Ray for several years before transitioning to our Ocean Alexander, but I felt like I still had a lot to learn. We took several classes (for me) to learn about charts, plotting a course, anchoring, basic engine "stuff", how to tie lines, etc. The course along with attending several AGLCA functions gave me a good start, but learning as you cruise is the best lesson.

As I stated at the beginning of this article, being prepared – as much as possible – is engrained in me. I was a Girl Scout, started working at age 12, and eventually ended up in my professional life working at a wide variety of positions from a Nuclear Plant with Tennessee Valley Authority to NASA's Research & Development Group to the Oil & Gas Industry, and including 4 years in a war zone during the Second Gulf War, which is why my motto is always "Be Prepared". One never knows what is going to happen out of the ordinary. That doesn't mean you have to know everything, but in my opinion, in applying this philosophy to boating, two items belong at the top of the list.

First, the Captain and 1st Mate should do the route planning together. I know several women who are Captains on their boat (very impressive) so there is no assumption as to the gender of these positions. Plot the course and if anchoring, identify at least three anchorages in case one does not work out. We learned early that a recommended anchorage on Active Captain did not always include an anchor swing space for a large boat, and sometimes there was just not enough room left at the anchorage by the time we arrived. In the first six weeks of Looping entirely in the Florida ICW, we found ourselves searching for a second or third anchorage close to sunset because the one first selected in our route pre-

planning did not work out. The big lesson there was having multiple options as the best remedy to reduce the stress if you need to move on from your first choice.

Second, know the basics about driving the boat and docking. Driving the boat is easy when you understand tide, winds, currents, channel markers, have a good understanding of the Rules of the Road, and how to read the depth considering the boat's draft. Docking is a bit more difficult, especially in tight quarters, with a larger boat. The first time I had to dock the boat was during a storm. Bad weather was forecasted and we were trying to reach the marina before it hit. But due to heavy fog in the morning, we had a later start than planned. The storm hit while we were in the Intracoastal Waterway; they called it a microburst storm with winds over 50 knots! It was too rough to enter the channel where the marina was located and as we were waiting out the storm before going to the marina, they called to say the owner felt the weather was too bad and sent the workers home. The Dock Master said "Good Luck". It was up to us to get to their fuel dock and tie up without assistance. Our mooring lines up on deck were soaked and too heavy for me to handle. Dave gave me the wheel and he went out on the bow. Was the docking pretty? No, but we made it in. With Dave's instructions and my knowledge of the throttles and bow thruster (although limited) we finally got tied up before the winds picked back up again. I was nervous and can laugh about it now. Dave still brags to others how I docked the boat that day.

A more serious example of requiring basic knowledge of driving the boat occurred in Staten Island. We met fellow Loopers in Cape May and ended up in the same area for a night or two in Staten Island before making the famous pass of the Statue of Liberty where our fellow Loopers were going to take pictures of each others' boats in front of the Statue. As we were preparing to leave that morning, Dave was on the dock getting lines ready and I was in the galley going down our checklist. The side door was open and I heard a funny sound. Looking up, I saw Dave climbing out of the water onto the dock and the boat was drifting away from the dock with me on it. The first thing I did was panic and yelled to Dave, "What do I do?" Dave proceeded to calmly guide me in driving the boat back to the dock. The bow came in first so he could tie it to a cleat. Then, I was able to get the stern

over to the dock using the throttles. Having a good basic knowledge of how to maneuver our boat in the wind, in tight quarters, and to use the engines/bow thruster to put an immediate twist on was paramount for me in getting the boat safely, and quickly, back to the dock. I can't say we ever practiced for that scenario, but I did have enough hours at the helm under all kinds of conditions to get the boat to do what I needed it to do (once I regained my composure under Dave's guidance and positive assurances from the dock).

Whenever something goes a little haywire, Dave and I always have an "after-action" discussion. We discuss what went wrong and what could have been done to prevent it. Communication is always important. I was focused on getting the checklist tasks completed and did not pay attention to what Dave was doing. We normally leave a dock by ourselves and, to maintain control over the boat, we loop the line around the cleat back to the boat, which allows me to take the lines off while departing. Dave thought he could take the line off and jump onto the swim platform, but the wind was stronger than he anticipated. As part of our normal routine, we talk through what each of us is doing to confirm we are on the same page and understand expectations. Dave was pretty bruised up when he hit the cleat and dock edge as he fell into the water, but luckily nothing was broken. The situation could have been disastrous for the boat if I had not been prepared to know the basics!

Completing the Loop was an awesome experience. We met the most wonderful people along the way and made life-long friends. While having dinner with a group of Loopers someone asked why we only talk about the "bad stuff" that happens. I guess it is because the out of the ordinary experiences are the most exciting, and are where you learn the most. It certainly makes for entertaining dinner conversation, that's for sure! For those planning to do the Loop or just starting out, be as prepared as you can – and most importantly enjoy the journey knowing you have prepared!



Chapter 6

Are You Sure??

By Carol McDonough

Way 2 Much

36' Carver 356AC

Gold Looper – 2017

On December 6th, 2016, we left Apalachicola (FINALLY - after 9 days of waiting for good weather!) and traveled 29.7 miles to Carrabelle, Florida. Carrabelle is another small fishing village with very little to offer in the way of dining or entertainment. However, Carrabelle is the jumping-off point for making the Gulf crossing, so Loopers go there to spend the night before leaving the next morning. When we got into Carrabelle, it was very windy. We had reserved a slip at C-Quarters Marina, so we pulled up to their fuel dock to top off our tanks. We wanted to leave the next morning with as much fuel as possible. According to Jim's calculations, we should be able to make a "daylight-only" crossing, traveling approximately 170 miles, and still have about 40% of our 318 gallons of gas left, under perfect conditions. We would need to travel at least 20 mph to make it in daylight. Many Loopers have trawlers that travel at slower speeds (8-10 mph), so they leave in the afternoon and travel all night to arrive the next morning.

We knew, however, that the Gulf was not predicted to be perfectly calm the next day, so we would use a little more fuel to maintain the necessary speed. At the fuel dock, we discovered that all of the front fuel pumps were diesel pumps. Their gasoline pump was inside a u-shaped area that would be very difficult for us to maneuver into with the strong wind. Since they weren't busy and it was lunchtime, we decided to tie off the boat and see if the wind died down while we walked a few

blocks to a diner for lunch. The dockhands had also pointed out where our assigned slip was located. As we walked by it on our way to lunch, we felt that it would also be very difficult to back into the slip in the wind. Jim would have to back the boat between some big poles, against the wind, close to some other boats. We talked about the situation over lunch and decided to walk a little farther past this marina and check out another one that was just next door to it after lunch. On our way back, we discovered the world's smallest police station!



We walked next door to the Moorings at Carrabelle Marina and asked what their docking situation was like. We immediately saw that their fuel dock was much easier to get into. Also, they would let us tie alongside their long dock wall, which would be much easier for us to dock the boat. So, we changed marinas and moved next door. This marina also had a nice boater's lounge building, where we met up with about a dozen other Loopers for docktails that evening! All of them also planned to leave the next day to cross the Gulf.

The next morning, on Wednesday, December 7th, we got up very early and prepared to leave at sun-up. We secured any loose items in the

cabin and went through our usual routine to prepare the boat for departure. When it was time to start the engines, we found that the starboard engine would not fire up. Jim crawled into the engine compartment to troubleshoot the issue. After examining the situation, he determined that he could hear the starter spinning, and believed that the solenoid was to blame. He examined all of the cables and connections, and everything seemed to be okay. Then, we both remembered that solenoids could sometimes freeze up, and just needed to be jarred a little to loosen them. So, Jim tapped on it lightly with a hammer. When I turned the ignition key, it started right up! However, now we had lost about 30 minutes of daylight, and

had to recalculate whether we could still make it before dark. We determined that it would be close, but we could still make it, so we took off for the Gulf.

The wind had completely died down from the day before, thank goodness! The water in the river and bay was very calm and flat. When we went through East Pass into the Gulf, we encountered gently rolling waves, about 2-3 feet high. The waves were spaced far enough apart that we just rode up and down on them, rather than smacking down on them. There were only two times during the entire day that we actually hit down hard enough to get salt spray over the bow of the boat. As we were heading out, the sun was just rising to eye-level. It was VERY bright, and we were heading directly into it. It took about 20 minutes for it to rise far enough that it wasn't an issue any longer.



It was a beautiful day, and everything was looking good ... until the port engine started surging. It seemed that our contaminated fuel issue was raising its ugly head again. We took on fuel at a previous marina that ran out of gas while we were pumping. We pumped sludge from the bottom of their tanks into our port engine tank. We had been fighting this issue for the past month.

In the past, Jim was able to change the fuel filter and it would run okay again for a while. However, changing a filter while the boat was traversing these waves would be a challenge. Nevertheless, it was our only alternative. So, we shut down the port engine, and I took over the helm. Jim headed down below to change the filter. When he came back up, we were able to start the port engine and move on again. Just a few minutes later, it started to surge again. It was apparent that we wouldn't be able to use the fuel in the port tank ... all 98 gallons of it! Now, we may not have enough fuel in our other two tanks to make it all the way across. We

switched the port engine over to our auxiliary tank, and we were able to continue our journey. We thought that perhaps by running and jostling the port tank for a while, we might be able to switch back to it later.

When we got to within about 25 miles of shore, we realized that we did not have enough fuel to make it. We tried switching back to the port tank, but it still wouldn't run. So, Jim got on the VHF radio and tried to hail TowBoatUS. As part of our boat insurance policy, we purchased "gold level" towing insurance. Gold level insurance covers any towing emergency within 15 miles of shore. TowBoatUS did not answer us, so Jim called the US Coast Guard to explain our emergency. The USCG was then able to reach TowBoatUS, and they called us back. It was going to take the towboat 90 minutes to get to us. In the meantime, we continued on our route at idle speed. By the time the towboat arrived, we were still idling and were now only about 14 miles from shore. It was also almost dark.

We got the towing bridle attached to the bow of the boat, and we sat back and let the towboat captain do the driving. TowBoatUS called ahead to our planned destination, Turtle Cove Marina in Tarpon Springs, to arrange a slip for us since we were still too far out from shore to have cellular service. They even called our daughter, Cara, to let her know about the situation. We had previously told Cara that if she didn't hear from us by 6 pm, call the Coast Guard and alert them. As it turned out, navigating into Turtle Cove was somewhat tricky. The channel was very narrow and shallow. It was kind of nice that the towboat captain knew where he was going. He towed us right to our slip!

On the way in, it had dawned on us that the marina staff had gone home for the day. We called Herb Seaton, a fellow AGLCA member who serves as a "Harbor Host" for the Tarpon Springs area. He was able to call some fellow Loopers that he knew were staying at Turtle Cove and ask them to meet us at our slip to handle our dock lines. When we got to the slip, we still had enough fuel left to start up our engines to maneuver into the dock. Myron and Linda, fellow Loopers from *Miss Bailey* were there to meet us. And, the TowBoatUS bill was \$0! All's well that ends well! WE MADE IT!!!



Chapter 7

American History on the Great Loop

By Theresa Jo Gaffney
The Home Office
32' Nordic Tug
Gold Looper – 2018

If you are like me, your 8th Grade American History class was rather dry and boring. I hated memorizing dates and places and names. But it is one thing to read about places and events from a monotonous textbook, and quite another to visit these historic places and feel the spirits of the past all around you. To my pleasant surprise, I became quite the history buff, all because of the Great Loop!

Folks today may have forgotten that people used to travel great distances by boat. In fact, most of the major cities of the world are built on rivers because rivers were the primary means of transportation, especially over long distances. Rivers used to be the highways. As Great Loopers, we travel the way our ancestors did, through the same waters, to many of the same places, and we are never the same afterward. I'd like to tell you about just a few of the historic places that impacted us on our journey.

THE DISMAL SWAMP

We were in the early weeks of our Loop, still “newbies”, when we approached the Dismal Swamp on our way to the Chesapeake Bay. We had heard of this historic canal, and we knew that it was twenty-two miles long and approximately six feet

deep throughout. But we didn't know much else about it. There were two locks on the Dismal Swamp canal, one on each end. Before each lock was a drawbridge which worked in conjunction with the lock. We would have to pass under the drawbridge first, then pass through the lock. We arrived at the first of the two drawbridges/locks – South Mills - in time for the 11:00 a.m. opening. It took us nearly 45 minutes to go through.

Now perhaps, like me, you have wondered how the Dismal Swamp got its name. In the early 1700s, a man named William Byrd II was tasked with surveying the border between North Carolina and Virginia. He did not develop a very favorable opinion of the swampy area in between them, thus he dubbed it the Dismal Swamp. However, his contemporary, George Washington, thought the area was beautiful and full of potential. George had the idea that if the swamp were to be drained, it could be rich farming land. So, as an owner of the Dismal Swamp Land Company, he started the first commercial use of the land. It is interesting to note that this canal, which was built by slaves, was later used as part of the Underground Railroad to help slaves gain their freedom. The Dismal Swamp is now on the National Register of Historic Places in part because of its significance in the Underground Railroad.

Today, the Dismal Swamp is not at all dismal. It is teeming with life! On the day we traveled through it in May 2015, the foliage was thick, hanging into and over the water on both sides of the narrow channel. Along the way, we saw raccoons, geese, and numerous turtles resting on logs at the water's edge. Honeysuckle covered the trees and bushes on both sides of the canal, and lily pads were everywhere. The scent of honeysuckle wafting into the open doors of the boat was heavenly. For long stretches, we saw undisturbed beauty, which was marred only by the occasional noise and quick glimpses of cars on the road (US 17) which runs parallel to the canal. We followed the canal towards the Visitors' Center and the Dismal Swamp State Park. We made our way to the Visitors' Center dock, tied up, and visited the museum.

When we got back to our boat, we noticed that many more boats had arrived at the dock, and some were rafted together because there was no more room across the

dock. These days, of course, we know how much fun rafting together can be, but on that day I was not at all comfortable with the thought of having total strangers tied up to our boat. The very idea! So, we left quickly, lest another boat showed up and wanted to raft up to us. That is one of our few regrets from our whole Loop – we missed out on what might have been a great time meeting other boaters. But we were still new to the whole Looping experience and didn't know any better. And, as it turned out, we had our own good time waiting ahead.

After leaving the museum and Visitors' Center we quickly realized we had not planned this out very well. The last opening of the second drawbridge and lock - Deep Creek - was at 3:30 p.m., and we were not going to make it. The entire canal is a *No Wake Zone*, which for us meant that we could not go faster than 6 knots. We called ahead to the lockmaster to see if he could delay the opening for us, but he said no. We were not happy. We did not arrive at the drawbridge until about 4:00 p.m., and we were literally at a dead stop. We were going to be stuck there in the Dismal Swamp for the night! Just the very sound of that was terrifying to me. So far, we had always stayed at a marina or some kind of "real" dock. But, alas, there we were, with no other options. We could not move forward until the next morning's 8:30 a.m. opening.

Thus, we found ourselves tied up to the concrete bulkhead next to the drawbridge. Adding to my apprehension was the fact that we were in what looked like a sketchy area. Immediately to our right was an abandoned Mexican restaurant, complete with graffiti all over the walls and broken windows and glass everywhere. Its parking lot was an overgrown mess of weeds and trash. I was very cautious about walking our dog, Lucy. There was absolutely no chance of me letting her off-leash here, but we managed to find a place for her to do her business. She sensed my nervousness and stayed very close to me, without me telling her. We returned to the boat and continued to assess our situation. This was a busy bridge with vehicles passing over it non-stop, and it was very loud.

It wasn't long before a sailboat arrived and tied up behind us on the bulkhead. We went out to help catch their lines. After talking with them for a few minutes we learned that they had stayed here before with no issues whatsoever. That was truly comforting.

As we walked back to our boat, I noticed something I'd missed before. Just outside our boat on the bulkhead, exactly at the level of our salon window, was a guardrail. Written or painted all over it were the names and dates of all the other boats that had done the very same thing we were doing right at that minute. Some of the dates were very recent. So, I laughed, ran inside and grabbed our Sharpie pen, and added "M/V The Home Office, May 20, 2015" to that guardrail, joining the dozens of boaters who had done this before us. We used our brand-new grill to cook steaks, poured ourselves some wine, and had a fantastic evening.

As it turned out, we spent a peaceful, uneventful night on that bulkhead, with all ports and windows open, feeling the cool, comfortable night air. There were no bugs at all, which I found surprising since we were supposedly in a "swamp". After a while, even the noise of the cars lessened, and it became relatively quiet. But there are few alarm clocks more effective than the sound of hundreds of cars crossing the bridge on their way to work.

There was no missing the opening of the drawbridge this time! We were front and center of the Deep Creek Bridge at the stroke of 8:30 a.m. It was only a short distance then to the lock, which would lower us 8 feet. From there we were off to the Chesapeake Bay!

POTOMAC RIVER AND WASHINGTON, DC

Turning onto the Potomac River from the Chesapeake Bay was impressive, as the mouth was very wide. We loved the Potomac, and even though the waters were choppy, it was a pleasant ride. It is approximately 95 miles from the mouth of the Potomac River to Washington, DC, so we stopped about halfway up the river at Colonial Beach, VA for the night.

The next morning, we left Bayside Marina in Colonial Beach at 8:30 a.m. Because we made it from the Chesapeake Bay to Colonial Beach in about four hours, we predicted we would get to DC in four to five hours as well. But unfortunately, we

were fighting the tide the whole way, which we did not anticipate, and it took us nine hours to get there. We were pretty tired as we neared DC, but we couldn't help getting excited as we passed Mount Vernon – George Washington's home – on our left. Years ago, we visited Mt. Vernon by car, and as we walked the grounds we saw the Potomac River and all of the boats going back and forth. We said to ourselves, wouldn't it be awesome to have our boat travel through here? And here we were!

Further up the river just beyond Mt. Vernon was the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, and what an awesome sight to see – the Washington Monument looming tall in the distance. We passed Ft. Washington on our right and crossed under the bridge. Now we could see both the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol Building's dome. We passed Ronald Reagan Airport on the left. Pretty soon we had our marina in sight and hailed them.

“HELLOOOOO HOME OFFICE! WELCOME TO WASHINGTON, DC!” That was the cheerful yell given to us over the VHF radio by our dock master, Kelvin, as we arrived at Capital Yacht Club. We were whooping and laughing. We were finally here! We were so excited to be in our nation's capital.

Virtually everything related to America's history is captured in the museums and monuments in Washington, DC, and the vast majority of them, if not all, are free of charge. You simply come and explore. For some of the most popular venues, it might be necessary to get a reservation ticket with the time you are allowed in. Those venues are still free, but obviously, they can only accommodate so many people at one time.

Of all the Smithsonian museums, our favorite was the American History Museum, aptly nicknamed “America's Attic.” Around every corner was another iconic relic of America. Some of our favorite exhibits included Dorothy's ruby red slippers, Mr. Rogers' sweater, Apollo Ohno's skates, The Count (from Sesame Street), the Tuskegee Airmen display, Archie and Edith Bunker's chairs, Julia Child's kitchen, the lunch boxes featuring our favorite childhood TV shows, the anti-littering posters, the Crash Dummies, and so much more.

But our favorite display was the Star-Spangled Banner, the very flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write his poem “Defence of Fort McHenry” which eventually became the song, “The Star-Spangled Banner”, our National Anthem. We learned a great deal about this flag. During the War of 1812, Major George Armistead, commander of Fort McHenry in Baltimore, MD, commissioned Mrs. Mary Pinkersgill to make a huge American flag, one so big that the British would have no difficulty whatsoever in seeing it as it flew over the Fort.

Key was on a British ship in the harbor, negotiating the release of a prisoner of war when the now-famous battle for Ft. McHenry began, and the bombs were bursting in air... The battle raged into the night. The next morning, he and his contemporary were anxious to see which country’s flag was waving over the Fort and, well, you know the rest of the story.

After the war, Major Armistead’s family became the caretakers of this flag and kept it in a huge trunk. On special occasions such as the 4th of July, they would hang the flag for the City of Baltimore. Over time, understandably, it became much more fragile. Nearly 90 years later, the people of the City of Baltimore still wanted to display the flag for important events, but descendants of the Major’s family, who had continued to be the caretakers of the flag, refused to fly it saying it was much too frail. The people responded in outrage – how dare this family refuse! This flag did not belong to “them” - it belonged to the American people! After much debate and drama, a compromise was reached, and the family finally agreed to give the flag to the Smithsonian Museum, with the express agreement that it be put on permanent display for the American people. And so, it is. These days it is properly cared for at the American History Museum and is protected in a huge climate-controlled display case with low lighting, for all of us to see and enjoy.



BALTIMORE

We had a pleasant cruise north up the Chesapeake Bay to the Patapsco River. One of the things we were eagerly looking forward to finding as we approached Baltimore Harbor was the Francis Scott Key “Red, White, & Blue” Buoy. And we found it, just past the Francis Scott Key Bridge. This buoy marked the exact location of Key’s imprisonment ship during that battle. Pretty cool!

We circled all around the buoy, taking many pictures. When we finished, we turned towards Baltimore. Soon Ft. McHenry stood before us, and then the City of Baltimore came into view. There were huge ships everywhere. The city had been built completely around the Inner Harbor. Our marina was all the way into the harbor, surrounded by a wide promenade, lined with shops and restaurants.



We situated the boat and took Lucy for a long walk around the promenade. It was paved in brick, and trees lined each side. There was a beautiful carousel, and we found a lovely fountain which was a gift to Baltimore from her sister city in Japan. All kinds of interesting stores surrounded the other two sides of the harbor. Baltimore was called Charm City, and we agreed. It is charming.

The next day we hopped on the Circulator, Baltimore’s free bus service. It had a stop right in front of our marina, and it took us directly to Ft. McHenry. When we got off the bus we walked up a long driveway to the Fort. There were markers for each state, commemorating the date of that state’s admittance into the Union. Once we got to the Fort, the view of the Harbor was just spectacular. We watched a short video and then toured the Fort.

After lunch, we took another Circulator to visit the Flag House Museum, which was the home of Mrs. Mary Pinkersgill, maker of the Star-Spangled Banner. We had no more stepped off the bus and watched it pull away, when somehow,

instantly, we were lost. We could not make heads or tails of our map. We spotted a Fairfield Inn. Surely, they would be able to give us good directions. The General Manager was very nice and seemed genuinely delighted to help us. We explained that we had seen the Star-Spangled Banner at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, and the Red, White, & Blue Buoy in the Harbor, but now we wanted to see where the flag had been made. He told us that Mrs. Pinkersgill's house was right behind the hotel, but if we wanted to see where the flag had been sewn together, well, we were already there! The very building we were standing in had formerly been a brewery. Due to its size, Mrs. Pinkersgill could not spread the flag out in her house, so she moved it here for assembly. He took us outside and showed us the historic plaque on his building which read in part, "The Star-Spangled Banner Flag Was Born Here." We would have missed this had we not gotten lost in the first place. What a happy surprise! Finally, we went to see Mrs. Pinkersgill's home and toured the museum. Then we decided to walk back to the Inner Harbor from there since we now had our bearings.

THE STATUE OF LIBERTY

June 4, 2016, is a day we will never forget. We rounded Sandy Hook, the entrance to New York Harbor. *The Home Office* made its way up the Harbor, under the Narrows Bridge. Off in the distance, we could just barely make out a faint, glowing speck of green. As we got closer our hearts were pounding. There she was! The Statue of Liberty! It was so exciting, and she was everything we had hoped for. Neither one of us had seen Lady Liberty in person before, but we had seen pictures of her, as virtually everyone has.

I cannot do justice to the feeling that rose up from deep in our chests and caught in our throats, filling our eyes with tears, our hearts filled with reverence when we saw her with our own eyes. We were both so tired from a long day on the water, but we were laughing, and crying, and hugging, while simultaneously dodging ferries and tour



boats, which were zooming every which way in that busy harbor. We cruised all the way around her and got some great pictures from every angle. Another Bucket List item had been crossed off: seeing the Statue of Liberty. But it was more than that. It was a dream come true, seeing Lady Liberty for the very first time, by boat the way our ancestors had. But from our boat. Absolutely priceless.

Immediately next door to Liberty Landing Marina, where we were staying, was the Statue of Liberty Ferry ticket booth. The next morning, we took a short walk down the cobblestone street to buy our tickets. As we approached the building, we noticed on our left a beautiful 9/11 Memorial. The “Empty Sky” memorialized the New Jersey victims of that most horrific day. It was very emotional.

Our ticket purchases were for both Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty Platform. We could not purchase tickets to go up to her Crown because they were sold out through September! (So, let that be a guide for you if you are planning a trip there. Those tickets need to be reserved way in advance.)

The ferry took us first to Ellis Island, the point of entry for nearly 12 million immigrants from all over Europe and other parts of the world. It operated until the 1950s when it was closed and was subsequently abandoned. For nearly 30 years it sat undisturbed, and sadly, fell into a state of disrepair. But in the 1980s restoration efforts began and it became part of the National Parks Service. I am so thankful it was! It held such a pivotal role in the lives of so many American people, our ancestors included, and it seemed very much like sacred ground. It deserved to be preserved.

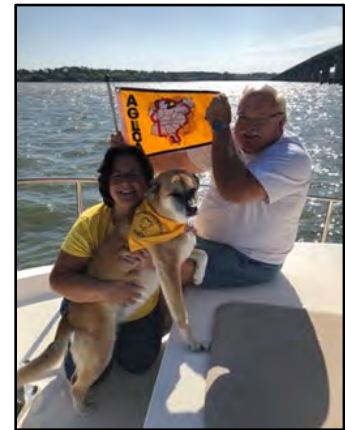
We spent several hours at Ellis Island touring the National Museum of Immigration, seeing the Baggage Room, the Dormitory, the Hospital, reading about the immigration entry requirements, and the stories of the immigrants who came. There were numerous photos of the rundown condition of the building before restoration. The entire time we were there, we could almost feel the spirits of those who had come through. It was somber and very moving.

After Ellis Island, the ferry took us to Lady Liberty. She was impressive up close. I

took a million pictures of her from every angle. I already knew a pretty good bit about her. She was designed by the same man (Gustave Eiffel) who engineered a very famous tower in Paris you might have heard of. But I did not know she was wearing sandals – I always thought she was barefooted. And I never before noticed the broken shackles on her feet. She has survived wars, hurricanes, and terrorist attacks. She has welcomed all of mankind to America, and she is recognized throughout the world as a symbol of freedom, hope, and opportunity. We were in awe. We stayed as long as we could. We caught the very last ferry back to our marina, filled with emotion from our day.

On Monday, June 6, we left Liberty Landing Marina and met our friends on buddy boats *Bliss* and *Katie G* in New York Harbor at 11:00 a.m. All of us wanted pictures of our boats in front of the Statue of Liberty. We took turns taking pictures of each other's boats, which was no small feat considering the traffic in that harbor.

It was hard to say goodbye to Lady Liberty, so we told her “See you later!” We watched her fade into the distance behind us. After the photoshoot in New York Harbor, the three buddy boats passed Freedom Tower and the Empire State Building and took pictures of each other's boats again. Then we parted ways, as *The Home Office* continued our journey north up the Hudson River.



These are only a few of the many wonderful memories we made on our Great Loop. We are so blessed to live in such a beautiful country, full of interesting people, places, and things. And there is so much left to discover. Your Great Loop journey will be unique to you, but I guarantee you one thing that is the same for all of us: it is the trip of a lifetime, and a journey you will never forget.

Theresa is currently writing a book about the Great Loop adventure she shared with her husband Tim and their boat dog, Lucy. “Looping With Lucy” will be released soon. Please visit www.theresajogaffney.com for updates, and check out her Facebook blog “The Adventures of Tim and Theresa”



Chapter 8

Whose Idea Was This?

By Mary Tobin
yes dear...
45' Bayliner 4587
Gold Looper – 2019

So whose idea was this? Well honestly the Great Loop was my idea! Why you might ask? Because my husband Dale's idea of the perfect retirement location is living on a lake in the middle of nowhere in northern Minnesota, where he can get up with the sun and fish all day. My personal hell. My idea of the perfect retirement location is living on a lake near a town with a population of about 15,000 people, that has academic and cultural centers, within a short drive to my children. A town with a population of over 100 is Dale's personal hell.

I don't exactly know where I first heard about the Great Loop. It might have been from a casual "isn't this interesting" discussion over an evening meal. Whatever planted the seed, it took root fast, as it seemed to be the perfect compromise for transitioning into retirement. Dale could fish and I could travel, meet people, see and do new things.

With retirement 2-3 years out, we needed to buy a Looper boat. We studied boats, studied boats, and studied boats. All we could talk about was boats and we still have this problem. Both of us had grown up on the water and both of us knew a lot about the water and boating. Yup, fishing boats, speed boats, canoes, kayaks, paddleboards, personal watercraft, inner tubes... The more we learned about

Looper boating, the more we came to realize we needed a little (okay, A LOT) more nautical education. For us, it was joining America's Boating Club (formerly known as United States Power Squadron). In short, we learned a lot from the classes and reinforced what we already knew. Education classes range from basic boating to Captain's License. I proudly achieved an Advanced Piloting Certification, although with modern nautical electronics you do not need that level of certification. A minimum of the basic courses is well worth it.

Mainships and Monks are the quintessential trawler Looping boats. We coveted one of these. Unfortunately, the Twin Cities area isn't a big market for trawler-style boats. We traveled a couple of times to see boats in other geographic areas which quickly got expensive. Ultimately, we evaluated our true requirements and decided to buy locally. Our Bayliner 4587 Cockpit was found in Bayfield, WI on Lake Superior. It exceeded all the true requirements we were looking for. Dang, I love our boat. A funny thing is that I have never met a Looper that didn't love their boat.

Yikes! As proud owners of a 45-foot boat, now what!!!! Up till then the largest boat I'd ever driven was a 20-foot fishing boat. I looked at our floating condominium and thought, "No way ... I'm never going to drive that." But I did.



And I can now even back it into a slip with wind and current. Dale hired the Madeline Island Ferry Captain to give us lessons. It was well worth the money to be professionally coached.

A couple of days of coaching wasn't enough to make us proficient pilots. On calm days we took *yes dear*... out into the Chequamegon Bay and practiced maneuvering, pretending a buoy was the end of a dock. It also gave us practice in communicating with each other. Screaming HOLY CRAP is not effective communication.

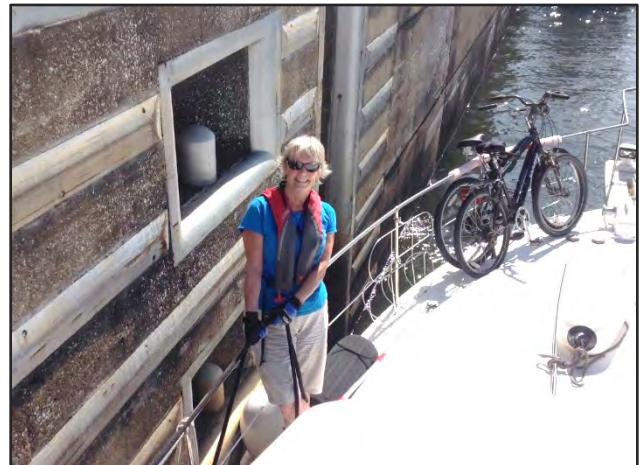
The marina people eventually got used to us. Every time we came into the marina

to dock the harbor master must have put out a call for all hands on deck. Everyone in the marina was always there to greet us, help us, grab lines, and get us into our slip without damaging our slip mate's boat *Diazepam*.

The wind always blew us towards *Diazepam*. *Yes dear...* has a lot of freeboard and moves like a beachball in the wind. On a calm day, we practiced getting in and out of our slip. The whole marina was on high alert that day and it was pretty stressful for our neighbor on *Diazepam*. By the way, *Diazepam* is a drug and belongs to a group of medicines called benzodiazepines. It works by increasing the levels of a calming chemical in your brain. I'm certain our slip mates used it that day.

We learned about "marriage savers" attending the Joe Wheeler Great Loop Rendezvous and knew we needed to have them. "Marriage savers" are person-to-person communication headsets. The first time we docked using our headsets my husband informed me, "MARY, you don't need to YELL. I can HEAR YOU just fine." Once docked Terry, our neighbor from *Diazepam*, strolled over and informed us we were a whole lot more interesting to watch before we had the headsets.

My husband and I are no longer novices. We are skilled, educated, and courteous boaters. Before we enter any marina or lock, we both look at the nautical charts and discuss our approach so that we each know what the other is thinking. Each marina and lock is the same but different. You need to be prepared.



It took me a while learning to feel comfortable about expressing piloting and navigation concerns. What did I know? Do not be afraid to express your concerns. Case in point ... September 2, 2018. The Racine, WI harbor had the tightest entry of any harbor we had been in so far. Reefpoint Marina's entry was even TIGHTER. The wind was fierce and gusting to more than 30 mph. It was the reason we were

going into a marina. Cautiously we traversed the marina alleys dodging clueless joyriding Memorial Day weekend dinghies and kayaks. Reefpoint Marina is a large marina and everyone was at their boats for the last holiday of the summer (i.e. a large audience).

I was concerned about the intermittent gusts and the location of our slip. I should have expressed it. A colossal crosswind gust nailed us as we attempted to slip into our slip. It broadsided us onto two boats. Ugh. Insurance was called. Damage to the other boats included a bent anchor, possible stress damage to a bow, and a bent davit. Us, BIG scratches on our boat and bruised egos. It's hard to walk up and talk to someone when you've damaged their boat. Fortunately, the owners whose boats we hit were true gentlemen.

Dale had been concerned about going into our assigned slip due to the gusting wind and assumed I was comfortable, so he continued. I had been concerned about going into our assigned slip for the same reason and assumed he was comfortable. Our mistake was not communicating. Had either of us said something to the other we would have avoided the situation entirely. After 'the incident' we called the marina expressing wind concerns and they relocated us to a different slip. Whew. Now it takes a conversation with a yes vote from both of us to enter into a harry situation. Do not be afraid to express your concerns. Communicate!

Both of us can pilot, navigate, and work lines. I have had to pilot *yes dear...* into a marina because Dale was in excruciating pain and could not help dock the boat. His back muscles had flared and spasmed to the point he could not move.

Dale usually pilots the boat and I work the lines. We make a great team. It's generally a cluster mess when we change roles because we don't practice often enough. Practice! But even practice doesn't ensure you are prepared for what happens next. July 11, 2018 was a hard day for *yes dear...*, lock hard. She kissed the first lock of the day with me at the helm and left a lipstick kiss on the lock wall. Dale 'tapped in' and I relinquished the helm to him. *Yes dear...* kissed the second lock of the day with Dale at the helm and left a little more lipstick on a lock wall. One would think that having already cleared 117 locks we'd have figured out the

locking maneuver. Breathe. It hurts to damage your boat. It's only a boat and other than pride, no one was injured.

We figured out the locking problem by the time we got to the 3rd lock of the day. It was related to us being the only boat in the lock and water rapidly being let into the lock before we could complete our tie off. This situation wouldn't have been a big deal in a big Tombigbee River lock. It is a big deal in a small Canadian Waterways Heritage Lock. *Yes dear...* had cracked the whip as if tied to the end of a trebuchet when a mini tsunami swirl hit her stern that was not yet secured and her bow-tied off. For a couple of minutes, we were pinned crosswise in the lock until the lockmaster could dampen the onslaught of water. To compensate, in subsequent locks, we tied off our mid-cleat first, then the bow and stern (this was against the lock master's instructions). Be observant. You know your boat. Do what is safest for you.

'Tapping in' requires confidence and trust in each other's piloting and observation skills. 'Tapping in' happens when whoever is piloting the boat is asked by the other if they are okay or if they need to step aside and let the other, who has been watching the situation, take the helm or assist. It's easy to get frazzled maneuvering in a difficult space such as docking in heavy wind or current. It's not that the other person is better (but in our case Dale really is). It's just that sometimes, to be successful, you need to step away from the situation to reevaluate it and collect yourself. I equate this to parallel parking a car, 99% of the time the car slips right in for me. Then there is the 1% of the time when I just can't do it no matter how hard I try and trying harder makes it worse. I have the same issue with backing up a boat trailer. Grrrrrr. Dale has tapped me out and I've tapped him out. There is no ego in safe boating.

I am certain you will find a mentor on another Looper boat shortly after you embark. Rick and Lynda on *Recess* became our mentors. You learn fast. It wasn't long before I found myself coaching and mentoring other newbie Loopers.

You are probably going to learn a lot of things about your boat. Things you never thought you wanted to know or thought you would be interested in learning about.

For example: What's a fuel filter and what does it mean when it goes out? What's a transmission cooler and what does it mean when it goes out? Oh, so that's how you change the oil. Honey, why is that little gauge bouncing up and down? We have a house battery? You want ME to start the generator?????? (This was only pushing a button.)

It's good to learn about your boat and high-level boat mechanics. I still worry. It's in my nature. But, I'm not as prone to panic when things aren't working as expected. In reality, there is almost nothing I have learned to do on my own as far as boat maintenance is concerned. With that said, I can check the oil and I've tightened a leaky shaft and loosened/tightened a few nuts in areas that were too small for Dale to get into. The best thing you can do is sit close when your husband is working on the engine (or whatever) so that you can run to get paper towels, a screwdriver, or dump something. I never feel like I'm very helpful, but I've been thanked every time because it saved him time from crawling out, doing it himself, and crawling back in. My hat's off to you if you can do more. I know there are Ladies on the Loop that can. I've met some.

One thing that I didn't know about boats till I started Looping, that has always fascinated me, is electrical shock drowning. It happens when people or pets are immersed in an electric field that has been established in the water. Very low electric currents running through the body can cause muscle spasm and/or muscle paralysis resulting in drowning. Boats attached to shore power are a major source of unintentional leakage of electrical energy into the water. It's the differential between being grounded properly or not grounded properly, a topic too complicated for me to explain. The mom in me is concerned every time I see a person, pet, or a paddleboarder in the water in a marina. I know how easy it is to fall off a paddleboard. You never know... I promise I will try to save you using my boat hook, but I'm not jumping in.

Gas-powered boats with an enclosed compartment are at risk for carbon monoxide poisoning. This too is a topic that fascinates me and is too complicated for me to explain. We have diesel engines. Diesel engines are at significantly lower risk for

carbon monoxide poisoning than gas engines. However, a gas engine idling next to us in a marina could be a problem. We have two marine carbon monoxide detectors on our boat. Fortunately, they have never gone off.

One final quick story on provisioning. I have an irrational fear of running out of toilet paper. To be safe I bought two cases of toilet paper before we started the Loop. I then forgot I'd purchased the two cases and bought another two cases. That's four cases of 12, 4-roll packages, or simply put, 192 rolls of toilet paper. This roughly equated to a planned usage of 3.6 rolls of toilet paper per week for a year. We had 32 packages of 4 left (128 rolls), having used only a total of 64 rolls (1.2 rolls per week). This is a 66.666% usage margin of error.

I hope that you found this article mildly amusing and encourages you to step into the helm and pilot your boat knowing your feelings of anxiety and apprehension are exactly what we've all felt the first 50+ times we did so. You can do it. After you've done something once you have acquired the skills to do it more confidently again. The Great Loop will be the most amazing adventure of your life. I could have told you amazing stories but you need to experience them yourself.



P.S. We still haven't settled on a retirement location. Guess we'll have to Loop again. Target departure date October 2020 pending a COVID-19 vaccination is available. Check out our first Loop and hopefully our second at <http://yesdear.life>



Chapter 9

Foodies on the Loop!

By April Smith

One Eye Dog

44' Aquila Power

Catamaran

Platinum Looper – 2019

Can a foodie and a gourmet chef live on a boat doing America's Great Loop survive? The answer is YES, even with that "one butt" kitchen, very little room for kitchen gadgets or pantry items, a refrigerator the size of a large shoebox (okay, exaggerating, but not by much) and countertop prep space that makes you want to cry! Once you get through the learning curve, gourmet homecooked meals will be enjoyed by all.

In our case, our former land-based house had an enormous custom gourmet kitchen with every kitchen gadget and tool imaginable. Seriously, I love kitchen gadgets and have a possible addiction to them! When it came to ingredients, my pantry had a pantry. We lived on a 10-acre ranch, raised our own meat, and grew our own vegetables and herbs. We even had a small orchard. I made homemade sausage, smoked our bacon, made fresh pasta, made my own cheese, and rarely bought anything in a package. We had two large refrigerators and a full-sized freezer. All of this was due to our love of cooking and the fresher flavors, not an attempt to go natural or organic.

Then I moved onto a 52' Hatteras Sport Deck for a year and a half before becoming a full-time cruiser aboard our Aquila 44 power catamaran. My storage and countertop space living on a boat made my heart beat really fast as panic set in.

The storage in the Aquila is far superior to the Hatteras, but I did have more countertop space in the Hatteras. I still occasionally choke up thinking about my beloved Big Green Egg smoker, extra-large Weber grill, and KitchenAid countertop mixer with its sausage and pasta attachments that are now dreams of my past land home life. My former ranch kitchen had a huge double oven; now I just have a small convection microwave that can barely fit two Cornish game hens – forget about a turkey!

I have adjusted way better than I thought I would. I have learned how to work in very cramped cooking conditions and my food is as good as ever. However, my three most hated words in the English language these days are “refrigerate after opening.”

Surviving the Galley

When we first started living on a boat, I compiled the absolute bare minimum of necessities for our galley due to a lack of storage space. I purchased items that were smaller in scale now that our family of four dropped down to two. As we continued cruising, I realized that some of my favorite kitchen items were non-negotiable. There are things I simply can't manage without. My stick blender and food processor are good examples. I decided to purchase an Instapot (first kitchen item I was ever afraid to use at first) instead of a crockpot. I am so glad I did. With my Instapot, I now make fresh homemade Greek yogurt every few days, incredible hard-boiled eggs, and soups that are out of this world.

A good set of kitchen knives was mandatory, but I was able to buy small things like measuring cups and spoons, storage containers, etc. at discount stores. Pots and pans were also something I wasn't willing to negotiate on so I bought a set of Calphalon cookware that is compatible with an induction stove. Finding the right-sized bakeware was a challenge since it had to fit in a small convection microwave, but after trial and error, I achieved success. I found getting round casserole-type bakeware and using pizza pans as baking sheets worked better than anything that was square or rectangular-shaped. Microwaves almost always have a circular turntable making square or rectangular pans difficult to use.

One day in a Williams Sonoma store, I literally hugged a KitchenAid. Poor Debbie, from our buddy boat Gypsies Palace, practically had to drag me away before I completely embarrassed us. I admit to wiping a tear from my eye as I longingly looked back over my shoulder at that beautiful machine calling out to me as Debbie pulled me out of the store! I keep telling myself that I can make room for one. I really miss my homemade sausage and pasta. After making homemade egg yolk ravioli one day by rolling out the pasta with a French rolling pin, I put a KitchenAid with all the attachments in my Amazon Prime shopping cart. I still haven't pushed that final button to have it delivered to a marina though!

Surviving the Pantry

Once I had the kitchen items down, I started looking at the pantry which is a real problem for me. First, I love having lots of different pantry items on hand as I never know what I'm going to make on any given day. I have at least six



different types of balsamic vinegar and fifty different bottles of spices currently onboard. I have one whole shelf of just teas from around the world. I have found that food brands and items are very different on the east coast and in the mid-west than they are in California. I tend to cook a lot of Asian and Mexican foods with quite a bit of Mediterranean thrown in for balance. Finding the traditional ingredients I was used to cooking with can be a true effort in futility. Heck, just finding a grocery store can be a challenge at times! I recently resorted to Amazon to buy products like kombu and bonito flakes to make fresh dashi, a good Hoisin sauce, and other specialty items that I can't find anywhere else.

Now don't get me wrong, you can definitely find good quality ingredients. Since food is perishable, that tends to be the main thing you buy when you live on a boat. There is not a lot of room for souvenirs and knick-knacks. There is also limited storage for clothing and you really don't need a lot of fancy clothes. So, my shopping outlet is the grocery store and I LOVE grocery stores. Food shopping is one of my all-time favorite "sports". Give me directions to the nearest farmer's market, and I think I've died and gone to heaven!

After determining what town we are going to visit next, the first thing I do is run a GPS for the nearest grocery store and restaurant to the marina. However, the items available in some small-town grocery stores can be a challenge even when you aren't a foodie! I remember how excited I was to cross our wake in Fairhope, Alabama knowing that a beautiful Publix store is near the marina. I love the inland rivers, but grocery stores can be interesting. Yes, I admit, I can be a grocery store snob!

The best part about small-town stores are the regional specialty items. Finding fresh ground sausage, homemade jams or sauces, produce that came right from a neighboring farm, homemade BBQ, and the like, is exciting to me. I love buying FROG (fig, raspberry, orange, and ginger) jam in the Carolinas, blue crab just off the boat in Maryland, fresh still-warm mozzarella on Staten Island, peameal bacon and Butter Tarts in Canada, homemade bratwurst along the Great Lakes and fresh shrimp in Alabama! If they offer a sample of anything, the item ends up in my cart. I am a sample sucker for sure!

Then there are just those incredible markets that you can't miss visiting along the Great Loop. Joe Patti's Seafood Market in Pensacola (we pull right up to the dock in the boat), Mariano's in Chicago, Mazzaro's in St. Petersburg (not near a marina, but so awesome they actually have bus tours that visit the store), Frank and Sal's Italian Grocery on Staten Island and in Croton on Hudson, and the Pennsylvania Dutch Amish Market in Annapolis are a few of the standouts. They are truly shopper's heaven with hard to find items that will please the palate of the most discriminating foodie.

I find produce tends to be the biggest difficulty. On our first Loop, we were so concerned about finding grocery stores along the way that we would constantly stock up on fresh produce. Of course, when we would get to the next town, we would want to try all the new restaurants so we would never get around to cooking on the boat. The produce would go bad so I would need to replace it. It became a vicious cycle of throwing away produce because we were not eating it quickly enough. I have learned my lesson and I am now very careful when buying

produce. I rarely buy much in the way of canned goods, but I do keep a few cans of corn on board for produce emergencies.

The number one challenge is getting to the grocery store and back with your purchases. We usually walk and finally bought a folding cart to pull behind us when we know we're going to go a little crazy shopping. Marinas that have a courtesy car are a Godsend! I always go out of my way to thank the marina staff when a courtesy car is available. It's always a treat to see what that courtesy car might be. We've been in everything from a 1960's diesel Mercedes to vehicles that are held together with duct tape and everything in between.

A true blessing is a fellow Looper or another marina guest who offers their vehicle. One of our favorite stories happened to be in a little town on Lake Michigan with a Gold Looper a few slips down. They told Larry if we needed to do a provision run, they would let us borrow their car. So, I quickly ran over and asked if we could. Mrs. Gold Looper (I never even got their name) gave me the keys telling me it was parked right outside the gate. They were taking their boat out for the night coming back at some point the next day. I was told to hang onto their keys and they would get them back when they returned the next day. I ran to get Debbie and off we went.



The ONLY car parked outside the gate was a super expensive brand-new two-seater convertible sports car. Sure, enough when I pushed the button on the key fob, it beeped back at me. I was terrified of driving it. We took a back road to the grocery store and I only drove about 5 miles an hour worrying about hitting something. I parked at the very end of the parking lot and would have bubble wrapped it if I had any with me. Debbie and I did our usual provision run meaning

we bought way more stuff than we should have. We looked like clowns in a circus trying to get all the groceries into the little sports car and then it was 5 miles an

hour back to the marina. I've never been so happy to return car keys to anyone in my whole life!

Surviving the Restaurants

Obviously, due to our love of different cuisines and wanting to experience regional delicacies, we eat dinner off the boat quite a bit. We visit Michelin star restaurants and food trucks with equal enthusiasm. I have several food apps on my phone and an extensive list of places to visit from TV food and travel shows, internet sites, and magazines. We try to eat certain foods in the areas that are famous for them. For example, shrimp and grits in the Carolinas, crab cakes in the Chesapeake, pizza in New York, hot dogs in Chicago, and oysters in Apalachicola.

Most people can tell you about their favorite museum, tourist attraction, or boating experience. I can tell you where we ate in every town we have visited in four years of full-time cruising. The best burger I've had is at the Butler in Saugatuck, MI, the best (and only) clam pizza is at Lee's Tavern on Staten Island, the best wood-fired pizza is at Hot Pie in West Palm Beach, Florida, the best catfish was at Bobby's Fish Camp, the best Mile High Apple Pie is at the Blue Owl in Kimmswick, MO, the best oysters are at the Hole in the Wall in Apalachicola, the best Butter Tarts are at Rachel's factory in Trenton, Ontario and the list goes on and on and on! Contact me any time and I'll let you know where to eat if I've been to that town (pretty much all over the world)!

We have also established a tradition we refer to as "Linner." Linner is late lunch, early dinner. We love to go out to explore the towns and, of course, we have to explore the restaurants too. Our typical routine is leaving the docks or anchorage by about 8:00 a.m., traveling for five to six hours, then stopping at the next location. We will do a quick reconnaissance mission to check out what the town has to offer. The next day, we explore and have Linner. This way we are back on the boat fairly early and ready to eat, sleep, and repeat the next day in a new location!

Larry and Steve also look for the local ice cream shops. Almost every town has one and the guys simply can't walk past one without stopping in. When we do

separate, the number one thing Larry misses about Steve is not having his ice cream buddy for those afternoon refreshments.

Surviving the Exercise

So, with all the cooking and eating out it's surprising I don't clock in at 300 pounds! I work out a lot, do a ton of walking and calorie burning boat chores are a daily endeavor. There is always something to clean and there are quite a lot of steps living on a boat. Handling the lines and pulling the fenders are a great workout too. When I'm in a lock at my cleat holding the line, I usually do squats and leg raises. Yes, I get laughed at, but who cares! You have to stay in shape for this lifestyle.

Debbie and I recently started Jazzercise, but we have been doing yoga together for several years. Needless to say, some yoga postures have a whole new level of difficulty when you are getting waked by a center console or sport fisher. Downward dog can end up with you being laid out flat on the salon floor in a hot minute!

We truly enjoy living our lives through food and have successfully made it a part of boating. We have found that how you eat while living on land is the same way you'll eat while living on the water. I remember reading a book about boating before we started cruising and the author talked about needing Dinty Moore canned beef stew and canned brown bread for meals while on the boat. All I could think was that if I had to eat Dinty Moore canned stew and canned brown bread, I wasn't going to live on a boat!

If you're like me and you want to cook from scratch while cruising off into the sunset, don't worry, the sky's the limit. If you love to eat, love to cook, and love to cruise, you can do it all successfully! All you need to do is find the ingredients, have the kitchen supplies you enjoy using and a little ingenuity to make it work.

Bon Appetit!

For more information on the adventures of the One Eye Dog, you can email us at oneeyedogcrew@gmail.com or check out our Facebook page: The One Eye Dog



Chapter 10

Cat Tales, Dog Tails & Docktails

By Debbie Russell
Gypsies Palace
47' Leopard Power Cat
Gold Looper – 2017

Cat Tales

Most people spend a lot of time in the Planning Mode to do the Great Loop. We went backward – we decided to live aboard full time on a boat and go “All In” without even hearing about the Great Loop. We sold our house and bought this long (47-foot) and wide (25-foot) power catamaran. We didn’t even talk about where we would go, but it would be somewhere fun. Our first task was to move our “stuff” on board and make some modifications for cruising. One day I opened PassageMaker Magazine and there was this big ad for the Great Loop from this organization, AGLCA. I joined it without telling my husband and began to read up on the Loop. It was fascinating.

I couldn’t keep it a secret for long because I was getting so excited about all of the places along the Loop that we would see. Very soon I was a daily AGLCA Forum reader and found much of the information slightly overwhelming. How could we ever do this? We bought the boat in October and by December, my head was filled with Looper Lingo, including a Rendezvous that was taking place that spring! My heart sank when I learned that we were too late to attend, but we would be on a wait list. I hoped that someone would cancel. It turned out that Kim Russo emailed me in February saying that we were in! Now we had to figure out how to get there in time!

I also wondered about our big and wide Catamaran. Could we really take it on the Loop? We didn't have anyone to ask (no one had big catamarans then) so I started researching any restrictions on the Loop for width and height. Gypsies Palace is certainly a "Wide Body". When she is coming at you all you see is width. I learned that we could not fit in the Trent Severn Waterway, but we could use the Welland Canal and go through Lake Erie to get to Canada. Great! One obstacle solved.



The second restriction is height. We had to fit under the Illinois River Railroad Bridge of 19.7 ft. I cannot tell you how many times we measured our air draft! We could fit if we took the satellite dish down and that would put us to 18.5 feet. But, this part of the trip was going to be a worry for me. What if we got there and had to turn around? What about getting under bridges in tight situations? The one thing I didn't want to do is be the one to go look at our roof and say, "Yeah, we can make it ... I think ... maybe." So, what my husband did is that he created a pole that I could stand on the bow of our boat that would equal the height of our boat. If the pole touched the bridge we couldn't make it. I will say that this really helped us on the Erie Canal because we were close to one of them! But we never touched. Another worry got put away.

It is normal for so many random questions and thoughts to pop into your head as you prepare for the Loop and to live aboard. First of all, you think you need to have way more stuff than you need from your house. I was guilty of this and so was my husband. I think I took all of my cleaning products from the house, tons of toilet paper (now a great idea after COVID-19!), and clothing that I never wore.

For some reason, I thought I would be wearing cute resort wear for warm climates.

The reality is that we had the coldest summer ever in 2017 and I had to BUY warm clothes. The marinas that we docked at were not “resorts” so those clothes just went along for the ride. That was a shame because it became apparent that if I bought something along the way, something had to go to make room for it.

A catamaran provides all kinds of space, including under the floor. It is much like a sailboat in that respect. I had stuff put away everywhere on the boat. Our biggest joke is that “I know it is here ... it is somewhere on the boat”. We also had a giant hatch on the bow of the boat. We called it the “Man Cave”. I swear, our entire garage from the house was down there! You will become very creative with whatever storage space you have.

Another challenge that I had about living aboard our boat was the dreaded “Changing the Sheets on the Bed”. When we were boat shopping a “must-have” on my list was a walk around bed. Well, of course, that didn’t happen. All of the beds on the cat were in the hulls which meant I had to climb up on the bed to make it. Oh boy, I learned to never change the sheets when I was tired because I got quite a workout trying to tuck things in and get the bottom sheet on correctly. There were times when I would just lay there exhausted on the bed. Can you imagine trying to make the bed from the top down? And, when company came, more of the same gyrations multiplied. Having guests stay just one night really messed me up. I had to remake the bed again! After a month I gave in and had custom bottom sheets made for the mattresses. Why I didn’t do that sooner, I don’t know, but it sure made that task easier.

Dog Tails

I would guess that 60% of boats cruise with their pets. On the Loop, I saw big and small dogs that adapted quite well to this lifestyle. Jazzy is our miniature Schnauzer. Before we left on the Loop, we tried to get him to swim in the pool with very little success. He was a “sinker”, not a good paddler. He would just splash around and make very little progress so I knew he would not willingly want to go swimming.

One thing unique about us is that we left for the Loop with our neighbor's dog to dog sit. Can you imagine? Our good friends owned a company that involved significant traveling and that year they were going to be gone a lot. We were their normal dog sitters and offered to take Mozzy with us. He is a Shi-Poo and a good dog buddy for Jazzy. We left Boca Raton with him and they flew to Annapolis to take him back. However, they also flew to Buffalo with him to give him back to us. He stayed until we got back to Florida - almost the entire Loop – a Looper Trooper!

Mozzy also managed a trip with us to the Bahamas where he staged “The Great Escape”. We were docked in Bimini for several days on nice floating docks. We had gotten lazy with the dogs in getting them on and off the boat. Our swim platform was so close they could step on and off. I had just walked the dogs and sat down when my phone rang. It was Mozzy's Mom. She asked me if I knew where Mozzy was. Of course I knew where he was (as I frantically looked around). I couldn't find him. But I thought it was strange for her to call me and ask me this question. Then she said that she had gotten a phone call from someone saying that he had her dog!! What?? I looked out and Mozzy was walking along with some guy and his dog! He simply decided he should go off on his own since he had mastered the art of getting off the boat by himself. My friend got the call from his dog tag. I was so embarrassed! Needless to say, the dogs have been untrained from that little trick.

Before we left on the Loop, we bought a fake grass mat for the bow of the boat and started reading about how to train your dog to go on the boat. It is all about will power – ours vs. theirs. I started taking Jazzy out on the bow of the boat and he just liked sitting and sunning on the mat. However, Mozzy somehow picked up on the idea and started using it right away. And, sometimes, Jazzy followed suit. I have to admit that I wasn't strict about it and mostly would walk them in the morning and early evening. This never is a problem until you want to anchor out and not drop the dinghy for shore leave.

This issue came to a head in the Bahamas. We were at anchor and the wind was

blowing. There was no getting off the boat with the dinghy. My husband said it was time for Jazzy to learn to go on the boat. We waited 24 hours and only Mozzy went. Another day comes along with multiple trips to the bow even on a leash and still no results, but the wind was still blowing. He finally peed after 48 hours. We kept waiting and got up to 54 hours when I told my husband, “I need to get off this boat!” Seas had calmed down and the dinghy was dropped for shore leave with the dogs. It didn’t take one minute for Jazzy to do his business. So, now we know he can hold it if we can’t get to shore. He won –it was definitely more stressful for me than him.

We had some fun with this subject when we were in Little Current in the North Channel. This is a stop where a lot of Loopers congregate. We were hosting docktails on our boat and talking about this very subject. Several of the Loopers with dogs were having training problems with their dogs not going on board. I had them bring their dogs over and their mats. We put their mats under ours because every dog that came on our boat christened our mat. They were so surprised that their dogs gave our mat a sniff and lifted their leg. It was one after another. We were officially known as “Gypsies Pee Palace” after that and Steve was called “Pee Daddy”!

These two Best Dog Friends are a lot of fun to have around. However, when the One Eye Dog, Abby, comes over, it is chasing and happiness all around. She is a little Maltese and officially is the Admiral and in charge when it comes to these two. It is pure joy to watch the three of them play on a beach. Sand is flying, dogs are chasing and Abby is jumping in the surf. If you have a dog on the Loop you will encounter places where your dog does not need to be on a leash, especially on a beach. It will warm your heart to watch them play.

One last thing on Dog Tails, if your dog needs grooming do try to learn to do it yourself. My husband watched tons of YouTube videos on how to cut a Schnauzer and he even got good at doing Mozzy. Groomers are few and far between in your travels, along with good hairstylists. Don’t even get me going there. There was a time when I looked like a boy after a Groupon haircut and didn’t need another cut

for 4 months! Oh, and I got a \$15 hair cut in a converted gas station. Enough said!!

Docktails

Everyone's favorite subject, right? Studying the AGLCA Forum before leaving on the Loop, it seemed to be all about docktails. I couldn't wait to experience it! It seemed perfect – BYOD and BYOA – Bring Your Own Drink & Bring Your Own Appetizer. We departed from Boca Raton, FL and at every stop, I would search out a Looper flag. It was crazy, but on every stop, it was the same thing – No Loopers. Then when we would see Loopers they would be away from their boat or I never saw any docktails. It wasn't until Southport, NC that someone finally suggested that we have docktails. I have spoken with some other Loopers, too, and this happened to them. What I finally realized is that I can “Call Docktails” and set the party! So, up and down the docks I would go inviting everyone to docktails on Gypsies Palace.

We were the perfect docktail boat with a super large cockpit in the back. One time I estimated that we had 25 people on our boat with room for more! In Chicago, we even took our boat off the dock for a sunset cruise. We had so many people that we needed to count life preservers. It was one of those special moments to remember looking at Navy Pier and the lights of the city.

Docktails are named that because it is frequently done along the dock where everyone brings a chair and some people bring tables. Herb Seaton, Harbor Host extraordinaire, likes to call them “Porchtails” when he hosts them on his boat. One of the more interesting places we have had them was in the Benjamin Islands in the North Channel on the rocks. We called those “rocktails”. Those rocktails stood out because the next morning our Looper friend became seriously ill. We had four boats traveling together at that time and luckily one couple were paramedics. It was a total group effect of getting Beth from Lab Partners back to Little Current on One Eye Dog. It turned out that she passed a kidney stone, but it scared all of us. Looping is all about helping others in need and this was one of those times.

When hosting docktails the best part is that there is nothing that you have to do except maybe supply plates and napkins. I was amazed at the array of appetizers that people would create. Sometimes it would be simple like cheese and crackers and other times we would have grilled sausage or a baked dip. There is no need to stress about what you bring because it all about sharing stories and making friends. There is magic in docktails. So much magic in that you may meet your Buddy Boat.

We met our Buddy Boat in Cape May, NJ, the One Eye Dog. We “dated” for a bit by meeting up at common places along the way. However, by the Pig Roast at Shady Harbor, we were a traveling twosome. Talk about a coincidence. Remember that I said that a couple had canceled for the Rendezvous and we got to go? It was One Eye Dog! We were meant to meet! Somewhere along your Loop you will find another compatible couple and boat and make plans together for stops along the way. Buddy Boats don’t have to be together 100% of the time. In fact, our two boats frequently go in different directions, but we always have a mutual plan to meet up again to travel. Everyone says that they meet lifelong friends during the Great Loop and that is what makes the journey so special.

The subject of docktails could not be closed without the Tale of Little Beers. Little Beers has become the un-official drink of the Great Loop, mostly due to the enthusiastic promoting by Gypsies Palace and One Eye Dog starting in 2017.



My husband had been communicating with someone who had been to Donovan’s Shady Harbor Marina, and they told him that he had to go to the bar and ask for a Little Beer. He would not tell him what it was. So, April, Larry, Steve and I sat down at the bar and ordered Little Beers. We watched the bartender make it and took our first shot. We loved it – we needed another! And, we needed to know how to make it.

On our next stop, we found a liquor store and bought a bottle of Licor 43 plus a container of heavy cream. We created the “Legend of the Official Loop Drink” as we shared Little Beers in many doctail groups. And, we always toasted, “To the Loop!”

Docktails can be taken to a whole new level with a group brunch. We were coming down the Rivers and got to Bobby’s Fish Camp way too early. We were with a few other boats and decided that we needed Bloody Marys and Brunch. We took an old camping idea of Omelets in a Bag. Everyone writes their name on a small Ziplock bag and cracks two eggs in it. Then everyone pitches in for the filling ingredients – diced ham, onions, tomatoes, mushrooms, spinach, cheese are all laid out and everyone takes their bag and puts a little of this and a little of that in it. Then they mush it all together. All of the bags are dropped in a big pot of boiling water for 15 minutes. After that, it simply slips out of the bag onto a plate as a perfect omelet. We have done this numerous times and all guests onboard love it. Of course, it is accentuated with a perfect Bloody Mary. We now had brunchtails!

One final tale is how Gypsies Palace got her name. Steve and I are card-carrying members of the Ft. Lauderdale Parrothead Club. We knew that the boat name had to involve a Jimmy Buffett song. One of the local members suggested the name from a Buffett song called, “Gypsies in the Palace”. The story goes that Jimmy was in Aspen talking to Glenn Frey of the Eagles about Jimmy’s upcoming tour. Jimmy needed someone to watch his house and Glenn recommended some guys he knew. Well, the song is about all the partying that went on in the house while Jimmy was on tour. We loved the song and the story behind it. Our party box is onboard and our playlist is set to Margaritaville.



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Chapter 11

Great Loop with Patrick

By Lori Welch

Sirius

27' Island Packet

Gold Looper – 2020

We had a dream of conquering the American Great Loop. Our plans of leaving snow and ice behind to retire in the sunshine state of Florida, after doing the Loop, came to a screeching halt when our son Patrick was hit by lightning and our lives changed forever. Before the accident, Patrick was athletic, self-initiating, and a hard-working high school graduate. He worked out, had a job, and decided to take a few classes at the local college before his first official semester. On July 8, 2003, Patrick's heart stopped from a heart attack caused by a lightning strike while walking to his car from school. He was without oxygen for several minutes. Months passed by before he slowly showed signs of being able to do a few things on his own again. Memory, attention, and initiation were all disabled. The self-sufficient son before that summer day was gone. A new Patrick emerged and we needed to accept his life the way he was and figure out how we would continue on as a family.

In an instant, our dreams of doing the Great American Loop had changed. But as time went on, and our lives adjusted, we mustered up a whole lot of gumption, and decided to forge on with our dream, despite any setbacks, and live our lives with

intention. Only after several months of therapy and years of adjusting to our new normal, Patrick slowly healed enough to walk, talk and do a few things on his own. Over time, we decided to dig in and return to our Great Loop plan. On December 31st, 2018 we sold our home in Illinois, put some things in storage, and drove to Florida in search of our Great Loop boat to begin the next chapter of the Welch story. Four months later, our crew of three set out together from New Smyrna, Florida to live a once in a lifetime journey on our American Great Loop. Patrick may not remember what happened on any one given day of our trip, but he has lived an in-the-moment adventure we will continue to talk about for a long time.

As you read about our cruising life from stories of our ten-month Great Loop journey, I hope you will be inspired to dig in if life gets tough, and live your life with the intention you dreamed of, wherever that may take you.

The thoughts of Looping with a disabled son in 2019-20 were unthinkable. My son Patrick, who was hit by lightning in 2003 on a college campus, suffered a heart attack and today lives with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) due to loss of oxygen. It was a day by day struggle in the beginning, and still can be, but we have all survived. Today we continue to dream and live a new normal as life goes on. The Great Loop Adventure was a part of our dreaming process years before Patrick's accident. The Loop was a bucket-list endeavor for my husband Tim and an escape to somewhere new for me. I can still recall all the red flags and interesting responses we received from folks when we told them of our plans. My daughter Lana would say, "So, Patrick will be staying here with me, right?" Wrong. I could not imagine being without Patrick for several months. He loves his sister, and she would do a great job caring for him. Together, however, they would be terrific partners in crime, and she had enough on her plate as it was, a single parent raising our eleven-year-old grandson.

I had decided that if we were going to do the Loop, we were going to do it as a family. When we described our plans to others, their mouths dropped, followed by, "What about Pat"? I started having second thoughts and questioned if I was making the right decision for Patrick, and the three of us. Although I continued to

dream with my husband over Sunday morning coffee about traveling in a new way, I also continued having nightmares of all the possible mishaps with Patrick aboard and leaving all the support systems that had been built up around a comfortable life, to just the three of us on open water while living in tight quarters. Was this dream possible? Family members had bets we would not last 30 days. In hindsight, not all the online courses could have prepared me for a year of wonders, worries, and awakenings that I would experience during our time with Patrick on the Loop. Now that we have traveled over 6000 miles in 10 months with our disabled son, I am delighted that we went for our dream and conquered the American Great Loop with him as part of our crew.

A sailboat? We settled on a 27' Island Packet Sailboat- Sirius. Consider a 30-gallon potable water tank and a 10-gallon black water holding tank for three people. I say "settled" because I preferred one of the thirty-something feet trawlers or cats or other sailboats over our tiny IP27. Not only did my husband feel this would be a suitable vessel to do the Loop, but he also decided to follow the direction of Captain John, who had traveled the Loop several times, and authored many Looping guides advising to unstep the mast (remove mast and sails). With mast and sails stored, our sailboat turned into a very slow powerboat. The single-engine and protected prop were a blessing. We had very few maintenance problems the entire trip, even though we ran aground at least five times with a four-foot draft. The issues we did face were minor.

For me, it was about the lack of space inside the cabin. How could our 5'10' son crawl into a quarter berth while feeling comfortable and safe? Would he stay clear when we docked or departed? Would he



PATRICK RESTING IN HIS QUARTER BERTH

feel the need to leave the cabin to travel topside? Would he hit his head in turbulent water, or fall overboard, or slip off the dock while boarding or exiting the boat? We planned for the worst and prepared ourselves for possible mishaps. What we found after several days on the water was, Patrick loved the cocoon feel of his quarter berth, and felt the more comfortable there than any other place on the boat. If he did try to move around in the cabin during turbulent water, he could not go far. As it came to be, he rarely came topside, but when he did, he always wore a life preserver. After 10 months of going on and off the boat, high seas, and miles of docks, barges, and anchorages, not once did we come close to a man overboard.

Hard Core. It was hard to teach Patrick that our 10-gallon black water holding tank would fill within a day or two between the three of us. Wondering if a pump our service was within reach, we planned to utilize the marina's restroom whenever at the dock. Instead of just letting Pat use the head whenever he wanted, we tried to teach him to use the marina head while at the marina. Learning a new thing is very difficult for someone with a TBI. Their ability to remember is damaged. If you don't remember what you were told, or read, it is pretty hard to follow a new task. Short-term memory was gone. He never learned to use the marina restrooms while at the marina, ever. We had a toilet, it was on our boat, and he was going to use it. As Pat would open the door to the head, Tim would bellow out "Pat can you hold it a few minutes until we walk to the marina's bathroom?" Patrick would answer "No dad, I have to go *hardcore!*" I have no idea why or when he started using the "hardcore" term, but after a while, it became a family joke. Quite often one of us would say, "I am hungry, *hardcore*", or "I need a nap *hardcore*", and then laugh about our private joke. I tried to post signs in the head as a reminder, but that didn't work either. Inevitably, Patrick won and used the head whenever he wanted. I mean, what else do you do with a toilet on board if you can't use it! Now if we could only get him to turn on lights, lift the seat and not throw any tp in the bowl, we would be in business! Regardless of his poor memory and new learning curve, we managed just fine.

12 Miles from Mobile Alabama at Big Briar Creek Anchorage. When anchoring out, there were so many opportunities to take in the beauty that surrounded Sirius. Patrick saw the beauty too. Our sailboat traveled an average of 5 knots. Traveling by sailboat was at a slower speed than that of our trawler friends who usually traveled 7-9 knots on average, or our friends with turbos who would travel 12-15 knots on open water. We didn't mind. We traveled the entire ICW whenever we could, even in the shallow northern part of New Jersey. When waters were calm, Patrick felt comfortable sitting in the cockpit with us as we cruised along at a slow pace. Depending on the conditions, like on the Mississippi when the current was strong and we flew at a record 11 knots, Patrick was happier in the cabin. On the Tennessee River when the current was against us, we were lucky to



A HAPPY FALL DAY AT ANCHOR

travel 3 knots so we hung out together in the cockpit singing songs, creating poems, or playing games together as we traveled along. We planned three to four days of travel, anchoring out two to three days, and then required a marina by day three to pump out, and add water.

Anchorage were planned with a backup anchorage

in case the first choice didn't pan out. Some anchorages were the perfect hide-a-way, while others may have been in a larger bay with several other boats anchoring out. While heading toward Mobile, Big Briar Creek proved to be one of those private anchorages. No buildings or boat traffic within sight, only nature all around us. It was a crisp fall day, so Pat and I sat topside soaking in the sun while we took in all the beautiful soundings. I asked him to describe what he saw at this

anchorage as we enjoyed the warm sun on our faces and this was what he said, “*I see skies of blue, and a white bright sun. I see the green ripples in the water by Sirius. I see tall evergreen and leafy trees, full of life. The leaves are green, yellow, purple, orange and red, all the colors of the rainbow. Moss hangs and sways from the trees and the reflection of all are seen again by the water’s edge. I hear birds talking and singing to us this morning. What are they saying? The sun is warm and it feels so good on my skin. I am sitting on Sirius’s deck enjoying all of this around me. Why am I so happy?*”

To Hell and Back. In hindsight, I know you should check your weather window at least a dozen times before heading out. A solid weather window is needed when crossing large inlets that dump into the Atlantic. Weather, wind, and current were all factors for our Sirius to have a good travel day. Waters can start smooth as glass, then turn upside down by afternoon. We learned this lesson the hard way after our pass through the Pamlico and Pungo Inlets on the North Carolina ICW. After this run, I started to refer to my husband as Captain Crazy in my blog entries. It was the worst leg of our entire ten-month journey. From Oriental, we planned to travel to a free dock in Belhaven. An hour or so after we departed, the water started to turn, and the waves picked up. Whitecaps turned into three- and four-foot waves hitting Sirius at her beam. As Sirius rolled, so did our stomachs. Patrick is usually pretty relaxed as we cruise, but when the seas get rough, he cannot sit still, and often I would find him standing or walking around in the cabin.

Usually during rough seas, sitting in the cockpit, focusing on the horizon was my strategy for keeping it together. But when Patrick started to pace in the cabin, that became my cue to secure all precious cargo and sit next to him, to try to keep him seated so we wouldn’t get tossed about. A routine you might guess. Hence the new title of Captain Crazy. As the winds gusted over 18 knots and our stomachs started to roll, Captain ordered we all put on life jackets. I knew this was bad when we were asked to put on life jackets, inside the cabin! I pulled Pat down with me on the cabin floor and held him tight as Captain did everything he could to hold on at the helm. My stomach turned and my head spun. All I could do is pray for Pat to sit still as I watched him heave, unable to help. It broke my heart. Eventually, we

both lost everything from the evening before, taking turns crawling to the head, crying, and moaning. As I laid next to Patrick on the cabin floor, I was reminded of pilgrims' stories, sailing over perilous waters on the Mayflower. What were they thinking? Was leaving England worth the trip from hell? Every so often, I'd check to see if the Captain was still aboard as I peeked through the companionway, planning his payback. Patrick pleaded with me to tell dad to stop the boat, but he didn't understand that we were at the mercy of the sea. The pain was relentless, and I pictured Patrick's brain exploding as he dealt with the seasickness on top of an already damaged TBI brain. If there was a hell, we had arrived.

The Great Loop had kicked my butt and I was finished. After four relentless hours, the water finally calmed and we docked at the Belhaven free dock and dragged ourselves off Sirius. Captain Crazy asked how I was doing. As I lowered my feet to the dock, I could still feel the waves rolling through my head. I was unsteady on my feet, but happy to be off the boat and on land. Patrick hopped off the boat after me, without a care in the world, and announced, "I feel great! Where are we?" Wonderful, I thought. I am so happy for him and his short-term memory. So much so that I wish I sometimes had short term memory too. Within minutes Patrick could not recall our travel day of hell by way of the Pungo Inlet. I continued to have sea legs well after we were on dry land. Lesson learned. We added two or three more to our growing list of weather and wind boating apps, so we could better predict conditions and never experience this sort of craziness again.



**SONJA, DUANE AND SOPHIE FROM TRINITY
OUR LOOPING COMPANIONS AT PERDIDO KEY
ANCHORAGE, PENSACOLA, FLORIDA**

A Looping Community of Compassion. After the first 16 years of Patrick's life with TBI, I have had a network of support surrounding me. People who didn't criticize a foul mouth, boisterous commentary, or unfiltered comments. That's all very common with TBI. Family and friends would step up and spend time with Patrick while giving us a needed break as a couple. Church families noticed his attention during sermons and understood the joy Jesus truly brought to his life. Organizations hired loving staff to watch over our son while they raise his strengths and work patiently on his weaknesses. I learned that even though these supports were extra special, God equipped us with a new group of compassionate people while cruising the Loop. So many folks along the way let us know that Patrick's language did not offend them when curse words flew out of his mouth.



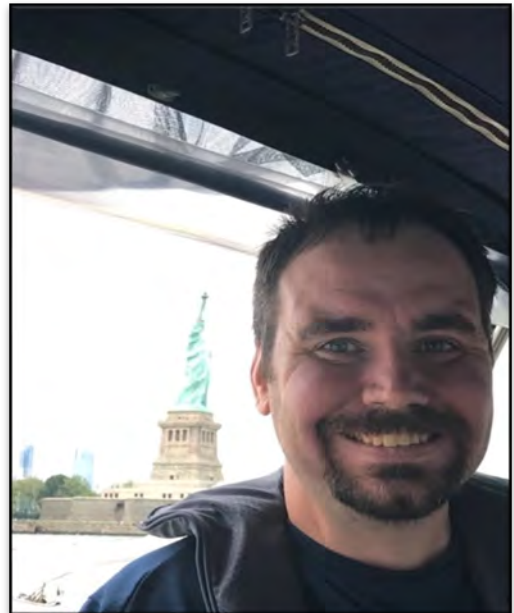
We attended church services, and there wasn't one that did not welcome us despite Patrick's outbursts. God even placed extra special families with us that not only cared for and loved Patrick but also cared for and loved Tim and me. There were retired teachers and therapists that struck up conversations with him as if he mattered more than anything else. Others invited the three of us to their boat for private docktail evenings. It melted my heart. Loopers NEBO'ed all along the route, and texted us, checking on our safety and whereabouts. Loopers shared meals, holidays, prayers, and let us raft off to their vessel when there wasn't any more room at the dock. We had several Looping boat buddies such as Sonja and Duane Finch along with canine Sophie, who were kind enough to travel at sailboat speed aboard their trawler, Trinity, as we cruised from Midland, Canada to Palmetto, Florida. They offered to spend time with Patrick, while the captain and I celebrated an anniversary with a dinghy ride and dinner. We met new non-Looper

friends from New York who offered their home for an overnight stay, home-cooked meals, and bath retreats. There were even people we met along the way, who were kindly drawn to Patrick's sweet nature, such as Loretta from Loretta's Pralines of New Orleans. Loretta walked up to Patrick, embraced his arm, and reminded him how special he is. Or the Baptist Pastor from Steinhatchee who stifled me mid-sermon when I tried to quiet Pat from the pew telling me, "Let the boy speak!" Patrick was always welcomed where ever we went. The people were the most amazing part of the Great Loop in my opinion, more so than any place we traveled or any site we saw. We witnessed genuine compassion all along our Great Loop Adventure.

Lady Liberty, Where is Calli? Most people with TBI lose a bit of their memory. Patrick lost a lifetime of special moments from his younger years. Patrick's short-term memory, and most long-ago events that did not resonate personally with him are gone. He doesn't remember what he says, what or when he eats, showers, or does anything that is not significant to him. He may not remember this entire year of cruising the Loop. He lives in the moment. Nothing more. He has remembered the name of our boat, Sirius and when he picked her out from all the other boats on a dock we are astounded.

Some things I try to remember for him and there are those things he will *never* forget.

While he may not remember the people we have met or places we have seen, he will never forget his 64 Chevy Pickup Truck back in Illinois or any of his special relationships from high school. One acquaintance was a young lady he dated back in his sophomore year. Her name was Calli. Calli went on to study film in Chicago and accepted a position with HBO. She eventually married a sweet man, had two



**PATRICK REMEMBERING CALLI
AT THE STATUE OF LIBERTY**

adorable babies and moved to Brooklyn, New York. She was a sweetheart by anyone's standards. Even after she married, she kept in touch with Patrick just to see how he was doing. Somewhere in Patrick's mind, he carries a special file on Calli and never forgets her.

What a magical morning it was the day we woke at the Liberty State Park Anchorage, a testament to the power of friendship and long-term memory. Up until this anchorage, Patrick thought we were still in Florida. He saw water, we were on a boat, and that equaled Florida. With buddy boat Seas Today, we found a quiet spot behind the statue among a young sailing class of little sailboats and sailors jibing about in the water near the park. As evening approached, twinkling New York lights from the city and Lady Liberty's glowing torch were enjoyed as we sat in the cockpit of Sirius amazed by the view. It was then that Patrick put the pieces together and knew where we were. He didn't have to wonder or ask. Florida was finally behind us. The New York sites strongly cued him to pull out that special file he had tucked away in his mind labeled Calli.

Almost Arrested at Pope Creek. One of our most interesting side trips was taking the Potomac River to Washington, DC. According to Tim's grandmother, Tim is related to President George Washington through Martha Ball, George Washington's second wife, so a George Washington side trip was planned. We



CAPTAIN AND PATRICK AT UNCLE GEORGE'S HOUSE IN POPE CREEK

planned to take a side trip up the Potomac to Washington's birth home at Popes Creek and then to his monument in Washington, DC. Our first stop was at Washington's birthplace, now a national monument and park. The monumental home sits inside a secluded tributary off the Potomac in Popes Creek. I called the park ranger to ask for information on how we could

approach the park by the water and asked for information on water depth. He told me the creek was very shallow with sand bars running through it, and that we would have to anchor in the Potomac and dingy to the park. Picture a small waterway with bluffs on both sides, osprey flying and nesting along the creek and resting on the sandbar. It was beautiful.

The original Washington home was destroyed by a fire, but a newly reconstructed home (monument) is perched high up on the bluff with the front door facing the Potomac. About 20-minutes into our little dinghy ride from Sirius, we saw the visitor's center but no dock to secure our dinghy and enter the park. After another call to the park ranger, he offered to come to the bank to help us tie up along the water's edge and crawl through the brush and poison ivy that led up to the yard of the visitors' center. No problem. We stopped at the visitor's center to watch an informative movie about the grounds, house, and way of life during George's three-year stay here as a child. Next, the park ranger directed us up the trail to visit George's boyhood home. Unfortunately, on our way, we were stopped by a DNR officer in full weapon gear and asked if we were the boat who secured our "motor craft" to the park shore. We told him, "Yes, that's us." We tied up as the park ranger instructed. Unfortunately, that was a mistake. I said, "Technically we did not 'motor' to the shore, we paddled." That comment didn't help. The officer demanded our licenses and started running background checks and asked if we had any outstanding arrests. After a few moments, he handed back Tim's and my licenses, but not Patrick's. That's when Patrick lost it. He demanded to have his license back and started yelling at the officer in an upset, TBI language that was thankfully inaudible. The officer was taken aback and told us that we were looking at a very hefty fine, but decided to let us go with a verbal warning as long as we went right to the monument, took our pictures and left the premises immediately afterward. We practically ran down the trail, posed in front of Uncle Georges reconstructed monumental home, took our pictures and high tailed it back down the trail, through the poison ivy and back on to Sirius. Whew! No family discount here! Just another day of adventure on our American Great Loop.



Biking the Loop. Biking is a Welch family thing. Ever since Patrick's accident, we have found that biking is still something we can all enjoy doing together. We are amazed at Patrick's ability to steer a bike with all he has been through! Patrick rides between Tim and me, with Tim leading. This is the way we roll. Since we started our trip mid-April, we didn't have time to purchase bikes,

nor did we ever think that we would be able to manage three bikes on a small sailboat. Fortunately, we had several opportunities to ride marina bikes all along the Loop's eastern shore. If we saw that the marina had bikes to ride, the three of us would set off for a ride to shake out our sea legs and get some needed exercise. At Jekyll Island, we used courtesy bikes to view all the famous vacation cottages of the Vanderbilts, Roosevelts, Pulitzers, and JP Morgan. We rented bikes at Hilton Head's Harbor Town Yacht Basin for a trip to the beach and dinner at the Salty Dog. We stopped in at Carolina Beach Marina where we also rented bikes and rode over to the state park through bike trails, and had a unique opportunity to see the Venus Fly Trap growing in nature, the only place it grows on earth is within a 70-mile radius of Wilmington, North Carolina. We rode borrowed visitor's center bikes along Virginia's beautiful Dismal Swamp and used city bikes to tour Washington, SC's Smithsonian.



Luck was on our side during our stay in Oswego, New York when good friends

from Just Jillian (Dave and Jillian Gloede) sold us their old folding bikes. We bought them, even though there were only two, hoping to find number three soon. By Orillia, Ontario a third folding bike was waiting for us through the work and research of buddy boat Honey Badger (Deborah and Kurt Kristmann). We were set! With the three bikes, we set out for the Gordon Lightfoot Trail in Orillia, the rocky hills of Georgian Bay's Killbear Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, and the Fort Bessie Trail to Crystal Lake waiting out a weather window in Frankfort, Michigan. Biking and Looping go together for the crew of Sirius.

The Great American Loop allowed our family to learn, grow, and enjoy time together, and we buckled up and continued to live our lives as the family we had become. We hope our story has encouraged you to live life with intention and may you also be determined to fulfill your smallest to wildest dreams! The Welch's are survivors.

Since Patrick's accident in 2003, through our Great American Loop Adventure, we have learned that life goes on or life will pass you by. It is a choice and we choose to keep going! We hope you do too! We hope you have enjoyed reading about our cruising days with our son, Patrick. Whatever goals, dreams, or plans you have, dig in! Live your life with intention. There will always be bumps in the road. Learn to steer around them, work with them, or adjust your situation to fulfill whatever dreams you have. Don't regret not following through. Instead, enjoy what you set out to do, and relish in the memories of the road you travel, especially with the ones you love.



Chapter 12

Life-Saving Loop

By Wendy Wilson

On La Cigale

Aka: Wilson's On the

Water

32' Bayliner

Gold Looper – 2017

My husband, Bobby, and I have always loved the water. I have been a boater my entire life with my maiden voyage at just one week old on my parent's old wooden Lyman. Bobby and I have been together since 1998 and he loved the water the minute I introduced him to it. It's still unclear if he was captured by water life first or by me, but thankfully they go hand in hand!

Back in 2001, we tracked the journey of our dear friends, Bill and Ruth, as they boated their way around the United States on this crazy thing called The Great American Loop. We followed along as best as we could with no Facebook and very limited internet access at the time (think back to noisy dial-up). During the course of that year, we lived vicariously through their intermittent emails and waited anxiously for sporadic photos. By the end of their travels, a desire was born in us to someday take this same trip in a boat of our own... someday... maybe when we retired...

We were already married at the time and had our oldest daughter, Nina. We tucked our dreams away in the back of our minds thinking that would be for a time decades away. Family life grew at a rapid pace with AnnaMay joining us just days after Thanksgiving in 2007 and then Ella less than 2 years later in 2009.

In 2011, life as we knew it came to a screeching halt. Our 4th daughter was born with a severe and critical complex congenital heart defect. She was given only a 10% chance of surviving. We were prepared to have only 20 minutes with her at birth - if she survived long enough to be born. By God's grace, Mia stayed alive long enough to be life-flighted to another state where the rest of us lived at the Ronald McDonald House for 11 1/2 months waiting for her to get well enough to bring her home. She was discharged just a couple weeks before her first birthday and while we were thrilled to go home and have some sense of normalcy, she was still a very sick little girl and we spent much of our time over the next 5 years in and out of the hospital. We learned a lot throughout those years. We learned to live life to the fullest and to truly not take things for granted. We also learned that living in one room at the Ronald McDonald House for a year may have prepared us to "live" on a boat. None of us are guaranteed tomorrow, but that fact is even more in our face with Mia.

In 2015, while we were stressing over Mia's next open-heart surgery, there was some talk of how this surgery might stabilize her for a few years. Bobby and I remembered our crazy boating dream and thought up this wacky idea that maybe the "someday for the boat trip" should be now. We discussed our potential plan with Mia's cardiologist and he was on board as long as Mia's next open-heart surgery went well. So, for the better part of 2015, we cautiously (and secretly) made plans for our family to take The Great American Loop. We were planning, but careful to not get too excited because, with Mia, anything can happen. So, with guarded optimism, Bobby took boating courses through the United States Power Squadron and we did lots and lots and LOTS of research. We even talked to Make-A-Wish to see if they could help us in any way for Mia's wish through them. She loves the water and boating so it seemed like a great fit for her, but it was out of their scope of wishes able to be granted.



God had certainly been our rock through all this trauma, but the truth is that our family had been through the wringer and we were all beat down a bit. Never knowing from one day to the next if we would be waking our kids up in the middle

of the night because we had to make a trip to the ER was enough to wear on anyone no matter what their age, but we found our kids were more resilient than we ever wanted to know they were. All six of us processed Mia's health issues differently. Some quietly, some anxiously, some with great faith, some with an outburst and some with tears, and most of us were a mix of all at some point. Wintertime was particularly rough as we were secluded in our home to not get Mia sick as much. She already took nearly 50 doses of medication around the clock, used oxygen when needed, had a G tube for her nutrition and lots of breathing treatments. It was a lot to handle, but we were so grateful for the time we had with our youngest family member.

Thankfully, we had chosen to homeschool our kids just months before Mia was born so they weren't bringing any germs home from school. Also, Bobby had started working for himself a few years prior and wasn't out in the public often. Funny how God orchestrates things ahead of time, isn't it? With all our efforts to keep Mia well, it was still emotionally draining for all of us, including Mia. It was time for our family to enjoy life! Living life together, having experiences, and seeing God's handiwork in nature would be worth it, and we truly had no idea how much more time we had with Mia.

As the end of 2015 approached, we stayed in contact with Mia's cardiologist and other doctors as well as her pharmacy to see what we could do about getting medications and medical supplies while on the trip. The next big thing was obtaining a boat. With all of Mia's expenses, we were very limited in our options. In a stroke of what can be nothing else than a huge blessing, the very couple who we followed in 2001 (and by the way are lifelong friends of our family), decided that they no longer needed the boat on which they cruised The Loop. Not only did they not need it any longer, but they also wanted to give it to us at an extremely reduced price! We met them at the bank one very cold day in early 2016 and signed paperwork for the transfer of "La Cigale".



Our next big step was getting Mia through the overwhelming upcoming open-heart surgery. The plan was to do the surgery early in the spring to give her time to heal. The best-laid plans ... you know the saying! Well, she had many

bumps in the road, delays, complications, life flight, and readmits, but it seemed as though she was finally "holding her own". Bobby and I had put a cut-off date in our minds that if Mia wasn't well enough by then, we would put it off another year. Sixteen days before the date we had set in our minds, we got the clearance to proceed- although many of her doctors were very reluctant about us leaving.

We decided to move forward with leaving on the boat trip, beginning August 14th, 2016, which happened to be Bobby's 40th birthday- weather permitting of course! We notified our friends and family just 2 weeks before we were leaving. La Cigale did in fact have to leave a day later because of weather, but leaving that dock felt like we were leaving behind a world where Mia was always sick and we were always wondering if she would live another day. There was a freedom that was indescribable being out on the water and unafraid of germs. It may have been a false sense of security, but it felt wonderful none the less.

Fifteen years prior, we had considered doing The Loop upon retirement, but after all that we had gone through with Mia, we knew that tomorrow is never promised, and we found it necessary to experience this trip as a family. Some people save for retirement and never live long enough to use it so if we needed to dive into it for this to happen, we were ready and willing! We thought, "If we don't do this now and we lose Mia, we will always regret it."



We knew it would not be easy. We knew we would have bumps in the road. We figured we would likely visit hospitals in states we had never been to. We also knew it would be worth it.

The realization was obvious to us that this was completely crazy and some people would not agree with our decision to do it, but for those interested, they were welcome to follow our journey and so we create a Facebook page for "family and friends" so that we didn't have to send 20 texts every time we arrived at a new place safely. It never crossed our minds that it would

grow to include thousands of people, but are thrilled to have met so many amazing friends along the way.

We cast off on August 15, 2016, for the trip of a lifetime and indeed it was! 305 days later, with water under our boat and some in our eyes, we crossed our wake at 4:49 pm on June 16, 2017. 305 days of hard work, success, frustration, rewards, grief, celebration, worry, relief, and every emotion in between. As we got closer to Sandusky Bay on Lake Erie, I was wanting to borrow the words of my Looper friend, April, who said as they were about to cross their wake, "Can't we just keep going?"



As we entered our marina, we all looked at each other in awe and I finally said out loud, "I can't believe we never visited a single hospital!" I could hardly even begin to put into words how amazing it was. Mia had never gone a month without an ER visit, an appointment, procedure, IV, bloodwork. Ever. In her entire life of 5 ½ years. However, Mia had just gone TEN MONTHS without a poke, hospital visit, or surgery ... mind-blowing. This was nothing short of God's blessings surrounding all of us. Did she have bumps in the road? Yes. We had her doctors' numbers and emails, but as a team we figured things out with what we had on board which included oxygen, breathing treatments, chest compression therapy, antibiotics "just in case" and of course pharmacies along the way when we needed them. And yes, it was worth every moment!

We rounded the entrance of the marina and in the distance, I saw balloons and our friend Jan standing there ready to catch our lines. And dock E20 was waiting patiently for us. Oh, the stories that La Cigale would surely tell dock E20. Stories of seeing brackish water not mixing with saltwater, stories of locking down the inland rivers and across the Erie Canal, stories of Chicago at night, stories of Manatees drinking the water from the a/c unit, stories of Christmas with the white sand of Clearwater instead of white snow and stories of dolphins jumping in her wake.

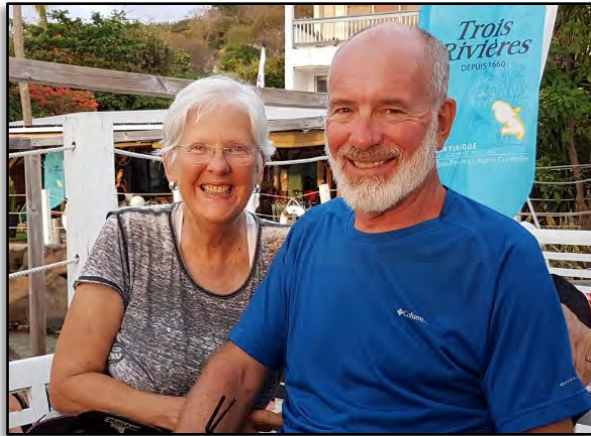
We started August 15, 2016, during the week of the Summer Olympics, but WE got the real gold ... the gold burgee which was already flying proudly on our

bow. Technically, La Cigale was now a platinum boat since this was her second time doing The Loop, but we will fly gold until her crew finishes round two!

Thank you just didn't seem sufficient to say to all our friends and family. They all helped in some incredible ways. We would never have been able to do The Loop without the help of my mom, Chet, our pharmacy, Fed Ex, and all the marinas and people who received and delivered Mia's medications and supplies. People loaned us cars before they even knew our name, they loved on our kids, they took care of our boat while we flew home for my brother's funeral, they let Ella help fix their windlass, they helped us fix our boat multiple times, they shared meals with us, they took Nina shopping, they prayed for us, they taught AnnaMay how to sew, they worshiped with us, they became our friends and family and they crossed our wake with us.

This was not the end. It was just the beginning. We left again in 2018 for "round 2" as we called it and made arrangements with Mia's doctors for us to come back every six months for follow-ups and procedures as needed. As of 2020, our family of six continues to Loop and has no plans on stopping. I am not convinced that Mia would still be alive if it were not for The Loop. It saved us all in different ways.

You are welcome to join our family as we continue to share our journey on Facebook: Wilsons on the Water



Chapter 13

Chance Encounters – Stories from the Loop

By Julia Erben
Erben Renewal
42' Kadey Krogen
Platinum Looper in
2013 & 2018

Okay, planning and preparation are essential for a safe, enjoyable Looping experience; however, it may be the “chance encounters” that make it unforgettable.

Our first “chance encounter” inspired us to do the Loop. From our home in Panama City, Florida, we had joined a group of fellow boaters for a weekend trip to Apalachicola, 90 miles to our east. We made that trip on the Gulf Intercoastal Waterway, mostly at 25 knots, in our fast 25' MayCraft. Little did we know that we had, in fact, completed a section of “the Loop”. Since it was not a comfortable liveaboard boat we opted to spend the night at a small fishing camp out of town. However, a run for the famous local delicacy at the Hole in the Wall Oyster Bar was mandatory. This is a tiny restaurant where tables are generally shared to serve the maximum customers. Our small group joined a couple decked out in crisp Izod and groomed to the nines – not rustically grubby as we were. The talk included our various boats and boating trips, so we included this lovely couple and asked if they had a boat. They casually responded that they had just sold the 50' boat that they had used to complete “The Loop”. Well, of course, we had to hear about “The Loop” and some of the details on their journey. Now, my take was if this spiffy lady – more than a few years older than myself – could do this trip – then maybe I could consider it as well.

My husband's story is that he has always been open to buying a boat, so he took little convincing. We bought the Stob's book "Honey Let's Buy a Boat" and the journey began. A year later, after much searching and researching, we brought our boat back to the Florida Panhandle from Stuart, FL, and 9 months after that – "retired" to live on the boat. (Yes, during this prep phase there was a lot of planning, learning and frantic activity about which others will hopefully offer insights). In January 2013, we left on our first Loop. While meeting the couple in Apalachicola was the first "chance encounter" that influenced our Loop, it was by no means the last. Being open to and in fact, seeking out "chance encounters" has greatly enriched our boating life. Here are a few examples and some of the riches we have gained:

Even though we had nine months to learn and "practice" with our new to us boat, a 42' Kadey Krogen widebody, we were both working fulltime as well as selling one house and moving to a smaller one. We did take several short trips and Steve explored all the mechanics of this, his first diesel boat. We had also owned and operated many smaller boats forever. Also, as with many Loopers, we studied and planned, bought tons of provisions, and made the boat our own. But, of course, after we set out, we soon learned there was a lot we had not yet learned.



One memorable "chance encounter" occurred on our way south just off Useppa Island, Florida, a couple of weeks into our travels. We had been chatting with another sailor on the radio and asked him how he found good anchorages. Having only been reading published guides like Waterways, we were good with marinas, but not sure how to find proven places to drop the hook. This brilliant fellow turned us on to Active Captain – which has proven priceless. It is hard now to imagine how we even got that far without knowing about the riches of Active Captain, which just proved how much we still had to learn and how little we had

scratched the surface of the boating world.

Along those lines a month or so later when we were moored in Marathon, Florida, and as we returned to our mooring, what do we see but a boat identical to ours virtually on our mooring. Now, this is a strange experience since Krogens are not exceptionally common. As it turned out those Krogen owners, Mary and Mark, have become good friends and as experienced boaters, helped us with that steep learning curve.

Two examples – Mary calmed my fears of those dreaded YELLOW boxes in the Waterway Guides – TMI – too much information – she said. Take it all in and use it, but remember, hundreds of boats safely navigate those tricky areas every year. Pay attention to tides, currents, weather, and situational awareness, but no need to panic. Secondly, she shared her iPad app – Blue Charts. Although Blue Charts is now obsolete, several other great apps are out there like Navionics and Aqua Maps. Of course, we had navigation programs and chart plotters, but she shared her techniques for planning and building contingencies, basically doing the routes for their daily travel. She did all of that for their boat and it gave her confidence to avoid last-minute panic and maintain control of where and when they stopped.

Since that early encounter, I have done all our route planning and research – the captain does double-check, but often only as we approach tricky stops that I have marked. It was and is my job to know about those yellow caution areas and to decide when and how to approach them. Knowledge is power, but it also helped me feel some control. I rarely fail to think of that early session with Mary, even now when I work on our route planning.

Although we did not specifically seek out the lessons we learned from Mary and Mark, we did get the clue that a wealth of valuable lessons could be ours if we plumbed the knowledge of those we met. By chance, we met other cruisers, but it was now a clear strategy to “pick their brains” by asking open-ended questions. Usually, I was looking for information on the route ahead, so we wanted to know where they had traveled and where they were going.

A great example is Martha Tuttle. She was a “chance encounter” on the wall at Waterford, NY – the eastern end of the Erie Canal. Like most Loopers, we stopped there for several days to get our pass, provision, and do laundry. Luckily for us, Martha and her husband were helping friends move a boat back to Michigan and our paths crossed briefly. She kindly took time to annotate my Skipper Bob for Michigan – from her years of cruising those waters, she was intimately familiar with every stop and advised us on the best-hidden anchorages, which towns were the best and why, as well as tips on provisioning and weather. Our time on Lake Michigan both times was greatly enhanced by this chance meeting with Martha. We later learned “Everyone” seemed to know Martha, so we were by no means the only lucky ones to learn from her and share in her enthusiasm for boating Michigan.

For our second Loop, we traveled the traditional route through the Trent Severn and Georgian Bay. On a stop in Belhaven, NC that year, we spent a lovely afternoon getting the secret – do not share on pain of death – notes for special anchorages and routes in Georgian Bay from Canadians who spent most of their cruising time in that area. Again and again, we have enjoyed the benefits of these “chance encounters” often the result of dock walking and chatting up fellow cruisers – even if no “secrets” were shared, we still enjoyed the fellowship of likeminded boaters. As a result, we have made it a practice to tour anchorages and docks chatting up others hoping to enjoy their company and mine any of the riches shared in those “chance encounters”.

Occasionally a “chance encounter” is precipitated by the willingness to offer help. We arrived at Chesapeake City free dock on our first Loop and the couple on the neighboring boat jumped out to handle our lines. While most of the people we meet are closer to retirement age, this couple was clearly much younger. For their willingness to help, we offered docktails as a thank you and learned their story. Dan had spent eight years building their boat on a bare hull. He adapted the classic lobster boat to suit their needs and tricked it out beautifully. We enjoyed their company and traveled together for about a week. In the process, we picked their brains on great stops in the Bahamas where they had just spent the winter since,

like us, they sought out of the way places and liked to fish. (We didn't stop in the Bahamas until our second year on the boat.) Off New Jersey, we waved goodbye thinking we would not see them again soon as they were going back to work.

Surprises do happen and good folks are often seen again.

The next year as we were arriving at Delaware City docks, we were hailed by Water Hog – finding it hard to believe they could really be in the area as their home was in Connecticut, we answered and again met up in Cape May the next day. They had taken another leave from work to cruise and strangely, we reconnected very near to the same spot we had originally met. One of the gems they shared was a protected and secret anchorage in Connecticut which we visited a few years later to see their new boat. A chance encounter on that dock in Chesapeake City has brought us a valued friendship that has endured the challenges of rambling boating life.

This story is not unique – we met Pam and Don in a similar way – however, we were the ones grabbing their lines back on the Eire Canal on our first Loop. Because Pam is a faithful reader of my blog and adept at “stalking” our AIS, she will pop up knocking on our hull in the most amazing places. Mostly now with the ease of email and Facebook, we still keep in touch even though we are currently cruising in vastly different spaces. Meeting up with Pam and Don is always a treat since it gives us gals some opportunities for “girl time.”

Yes, although spending time 24/7 with a wonderful husband is great, the occasional break for non-boat girl fun was a lesson I needed to learn. After almost nine months on our first Loop, I first had a taste of this when we lucked into a great group of Loopers for the run from Hoppie's on the Mississippi to Green Turtle Bay on Kentucky Lake. Typically, this stretch naturally creates a pod of boats who travel together because of the limited places to stop and, at that time, the locks on the Ohio River. On arrival in Green Turtle Bay, one clever Admiral reserved the marina shuttle, pooling our two-hour limit to give us enough time for a ladies outing back to Paducah. We did nothing more than wander and have lunch with a little shopping along the way, but the chance outing was a high point and made me

realize I needed to program these occasional ladies' events into my boating life. Another lesson learned from a "chance encounter".

As so many kind boaters and people onshore have reached out to us and generously shared knowledge and even resources like cars*, we try to pay it forward as well. Not surprisingly this kind of "chance encounter" also has rewarded us abundantly. On our trek north in 2014 we opted to do the Rideau Canal which we leisurely traveled in a little over six weeks between Kingston on Lake Ontario and Ottawa. We were tied to a small and very quiet dock one evening when Steve saw a canoe approaching with a couple aboard working very hard. He jumped up – I thought to help them land, but before that he grabbed a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses. He did help them pull out the boat with one hand and offered the wine with the other. We made lifelong friends from this simple gesture, the wine revived them from their arduous work against wind and current and our evening's entertainment commenced.

Later when we stopped for a week in Ottawa, they picked us up for shopping and dinner at their home – a rare opportunity to visit away from the boat. But also, one of the biggest challenges for me living on the boat has been getting a good haircut. Dropping in randomly had already resulted in some disastrous clips, so Ruth kindly made an appointment with her hair cutter and took me there, which again was nowhere near our boat. (Side note: I have yet to fully solve the haircut problem although a few strategies have limited the major crises – currently I am growing it longer so fewer clips are needed! A small sacrifice for living a rambling life.)

Chance encounters have in the past and continue to educate and surprise us but mostly enrich this boating life. Being open to, and seeking out, random opportunities is perhaps as important as any skill in the boaters' toolbox.

*We have had complete strangers offer us the use of their cars while we were anchored off their homes. Also, we have been offered the use of showers and even drinks on the balcony to watch fireworks! There is no surprise why most Loopers claim it is all about the people!

www.erbenrenewal.blogspot.com



Chapter 14

Not All Sunsets & Chardonnay

By Sarah Bowlin

Light & Salty

45' Cruiser

Looper In Progress

When you tell people you live on a boat, it sounds unbelievably glamorous.

Friends have shared that they picture me sitting around with a drink and good book in hand at all times. They imagine my kids quietly catching rare fish off the swim platform, and my husband grilling them for dinner. An image comes to mind of our family of four, holding hands, and watching the sun dip down beneath the waterline.

In theory, boat life is what dreams are made of.

If I'm being completely honest, this isn't just what my friends' picture when I talk about living on a boat. It's what I thought life might resemble when I signed up for this!

But let me be real for a second, boat life is not all sunsets and glasses of chardonnay. It's hard work, both mentally and physically.

If you're already into boat life, I'm 100% sure you can relate. And if this is something you're dreaming about ... allow me to show you a snapshot of what boat life is really like. Just stick with me and don't panic, because after I spill the beans about life on a boat, I'll tell you why it's the most incredible and rewarding thing I've ever done.

Here are 5 sentences I never thought I'd say until I moved onto a boat full-time to do The Great Loop:

1. "When I start to unscrew this, I'm not going to get electrocuted am I?"

Early on in boat ownership, we completed a few minor projects. Let me be clear though, they didn't feel very minor at the time!

We managed to install a couple of small fans, and even rewired some existing lights. My husband and I felt like true electricians. Next, we tackled a water filter installation. After some small issues that involved 3 separate trips to Lowe's, we had it figured out. As water flowed through our new faucet, the possibility of HGTV knocking on our hull at any minute felt probable.

Our confidence in DIY projects became so inflated that when our shower began backing up, I said, "No problem, we've got this under control."

Hours later I wanted to eat my words.

Turns out, the fix involved me climbing down into the deep recesses of our boat, a space not suitable for a grown adult! I then had to stick my hand down into smelly, murky water. Unable to locate any blockage, we decided to manually drain that space until I could locate the pump. Did I mention how bad this water smelled?

Eventually, the level got low enough that I was able to find a space enclosing the pump. Using every ounce of willpower and strength, I unscrewed the lid. When I finally got to the pump, we found it not working (which made sense since the water was not draining properly.)

I won't lie, at this point, I really wanted to call a professional. Especially when my husband handed down a screwdriver and asked me to put it in the water to unscrew the bilge pump. I looked up at him, unsure, and asked, "**When I start to unscrew this, I'm not going to get electrocuted am I?**"

Guess what his answer was? "I don't think so."

Yep. It took a lot of courage to press onward based on that response! But I did. And with a tiny bit of luck, I ended up fixing the pump. BY MYSELF. Add that to my resume!

We ended up flushing all our pipes with a mixture of baking soda and apple cider vinegar to finish the project off. Everything works and drains perfectly now. I truly can't tell you how accomplished I feel for having completed this job!

Ironically enough, a few weeks later I saw someone asking on a Facebook forum about the same problem. I was able to walk them through my process. Talk about feeling like a real boat owner! And I loved being able to help someone else.

At the end of the day, it's obviously much easier to pay for people to fix your boat problems. We've paid our fair share of professionals. However, I love learning about our boat and how things work.

Take away: If you're able to tackle small fix-it projects on your boat, DO IT! Start small. Rely on YouTube and other boaters. Boat owners are an incredible resource and everyone we've met has been more than willing to offer advice, and even help. The feeling of accomplishment when you complete a project is incredible. And you will learn a ton about your boat through the process.

2. "How do I know if that blob on the radar that I'm about to hit is rain or a boat?"

When we purchased our boat and set out on the Great Loop, I had zero boat driving experience. In fact, I also had zero plans to learn. Driving the boat was going to be my husband's job. Boating is his passion and he was content to hog the wheel.

We also had no plans to travel in bad weather. Doing the Loop with no real schedule, in theory, would allow us to move the boat in only ideal conditions.

But things don't always happen the ideal way.

Within a few weeks of being on the Loop, we realized it was important for me to

have a basic knowledge of how to drive the boat. If nothing else, so my husband could take occasional bathroom breaks. I slowly figured out the Autopilot and Navionics maps. I learned which side to keep the red and green markers on. And how to simultaneously keep an eye on every inch of water around my boat, as well as the depth finder.

The one piece of equipment I ignored was the radar. It didn't seem important or necessary for my navigation.

I gained confidence quickly. Driving a boat wasn't THAT much different than driving a car.

One day my husband planned a day of "vacation" from his job for us to move the boat. Unfortunately, there was an important conference call scheduled that he didn't want to miss. Then came my famous words- "No problem, I got this! I'll drive the boat while you take the call."

I probably should have checked the weather before eagerly volunteering!

I ended up driving into a huge storm. I literally couldn't see the AGLCA burgee on the front of the boat. My husband called up from below and advised me to slow the boat and use radar to navigate.

What?

I looked at the radar and all I saw was yellow blobs. I yelled back down, "**How do I know if that blob on the radar that I'm about to hit is rain or a boat?**"

Needless to say, we're still alive and our boat is in one piece. Although I never planned to drive the boat, and I certainly never planned to travel in bad weather... things happen.

Take Away: Learn to drive your boat. Learn to drive it using ALL the equipment, even if you don't think you need it. You never know when these skills will come in handy!

3. “I’m going to need a bigger trap.”

I really debated writing about this because apparently, it's a rare problem. But it happens. And it happened to us.

We gained an unwelcomed visitor to our boat that thought he was going to hitch a ride around the Loop. He ate our food. Left a mess. And made lots of noise at night. (Not unlike my kids!)

The first day we discovered our new little friend, not-so-affectionately named Lucifer, I seriously considered checking into a hotel. Instead, I put on my big girl pants and headed to Lowes to buy \$30 worth of mouse traps.

When that didn't work, we watched a couple of YouTube videos and changed to the recommended "foolproof" sticky pads. The next morning, we woke up to all of the food eaten off of the traps, but no Lucifer.

At this point, I wasn't messing around anymore. I called an exterminator and told my husband that this problem was going to break me. I was close to putting a *For Sale* sign on the back of our boat. The exterminator talked me off the ledge and all but guaranteed we'd catch Lucifer using bigger sticky pads.

With renewed confidence, I went back to Lowes. At this point, I was on a first-name basis with most of the employees. I announced, "**I'm going to need a bigger trap.**"

I repeated those same words two more times on two subsequent trips to Lowes. We eventually settled on the medium size Havahart trap. If you don't know what that is, Google it. And yes, it turned out to be the appropriate size for Lucifer.

Take Away: What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Seriously, having this critter aboard was truly my biggest nightmare. I really didn't think I was going to survive. But after I lived through our experience with Lucifer, I truly feel like I could handle anything. As much as I hated this experience, I know it built character and taught me how strong I really am. Other issues have come up on the Loop since our time with Lucifer aboard, and each time I think to myself, "At least we don't have another rat."

4. "Oh, it's ONLY going to be \$1,200? I thought we had a major problem."

I have always been the saver in our marriage. I use coupons and shop for things on sale. I love a good deal!

Our boat was a good deal. A great deal, in fact.

We bought it knowing it needed some work. I got the estimates for the work and it still felt like we were getting a good deal. So, we made the purchase and called in some mechanics. Suddenly the issues multiplied. They uncovered new problems and our budget for the work doubled overnight.

Even the things that felt like small, simple projects turned out to be really expensive.

At one point a mechanic discovered something. I could hear my husband on the phone saying things like, "Oh, no." And, "Yes, definitely replace it."

My stomach began to hurt as I waited for him to get off the phone. Based on what I could hear on my end, I came up with a worst-case scenario number in my head. I reasoned with myself and tried to stay calm.

When he finally got off the phone and told me the figure, I responded, **"Oh, it's only going to be \$1,200? I thought we had a major problem."**

It's funny how quickly large amounts become relative. If someone quoted me that amount on a house repair, I would have stressed out for a week.

I'm trying to keep in mind that we are making incredible memories. We're living out our dreams of doing the Great Loop. We're doing something that very few people ever get to do. Is it expensive? Yes. But is it manageable? The answer to that is also yes.

Take Away: Things happen, and you need to plan for the unexpected. I promise everything will cost more than you expect. However, I've never spent money on something so worthwhile before. Our Loop experience has been worth every penny! (Also, go back to my first point and realize why I'm so eager to learn how to do some of the work myself!)

5. "That marina doesn't have a laundry room, that's a deal-breaker."

When we started the Loop, I was so excited about some of the marinas I'd seen recommended. The ones I highlighted had swimming pools, work out facilities, and beach access.

I checked out the various social calendars. And got excited about the marinas that boasted a lounge with books.

Now that we're further along on the Loop, my requirements have drastically changed.

My husband suggested a great marina and I quickly looked it up. Here are the words that came out of my mouth... "**That marina doesn't have a laundry room, that's a deal-breaker.**"

Our family of four seems to go through a load of laundry every day! If we stay at a marina without a laundry room, even for a couple of days, it really piles up quickly!

Take Away: The bells and whistles at marinas are nice. I loved the one we stayed in that had a full library. The one we stayed in that delivered complimentary bikes to our boat was incredible. We love the ones with great restaurants within walking distance. But what REALLY matters to me now is drastically different than when we started the Loop. A good laundry room is key.

The Bottom Line: Doing America's Great Loop isn't easy. It's a lot of hard work- both mentally and physically. Like I said from the beginning, it's not all sunsets and chardonnay. But I'm confident that **all of this will make hanging the Gold Burgee that much better.** It's something we are working hard to earn, and I know our sense of accomplishment when we cross our wake will be unlike anything our family has ever experienced.

Sarah is traveling The Great Loop with her husband and two kids- Mary Grace (12) and Miller (8) on a Cruisers 4450 named Light & Salty. You can follow all their (mis)adventures on their website, MomWithAMap.com. They also love to

connect with fellow Loopers and future Loopers on social media. Facebook and Instagram: @ MomWithAMap

Bonus:

Here are a few more sentences that I never thought I'd say until we started The Loop (we'll call them the “Runners Up”):

How much caulk on my skin warrants following the tube's advice to seek medical attention?

Can I pay you to dive for my daughter's bike?

Who left the bait sitting on the kitchen counter?

That was such a nice pump-out experience.



Chapter 15

Stepping out on F.A.I.T.H.

By Julie Johnson

F.A.I.T.H.

38' Chris Craft Catalina Looper in Progress

My story began over 20 years ago when my husband Jim, an avid boater from a young age, first heard of The Great Loop. He informed me that this would be how we were going to retire. And the dreaming and planning began. He gathered every bit of information that he possibly could on the route, the boats, and the people. Me, well, I was a little reluctant. Okay, I will admit it took a lot of convincing. Now, my only regret is that we waited until we retired. I wish we would have been able to go when our three kids could have joined us.



One of the best things we ever did was joining AGLCA. We attended an information seminar in the spring of 2018 and the Fall Rendezvous that same year. We were hooked and with retirement just around the corner, the search for our boat began.

After all his research, Jim had a good idea of what kind of boat we were looking for. Because of his history with restoring our 57 Chris Craft runabout he wanted to find a Chris Craft to do the Loop. He even had the opportunity to ask

the grandson of the founder of Chris Craft, Chris Smith - what he recommended for the Loop. Chris said the Catalina 381 would be his choice! So, our quest began as we looked at boats from Tennessee to Michigan and finally found our boat early in the winter of 2019 in Manistee, Michigan. We had one more boat in Illinois to see but after lots of prayers and discussing on our way home to Missouri we both knew that this was the boat for us.



We spent the next few months planning and preparing to move aboard. May 19th, we loaded our things in a U-Haul truck, kissed our family good-bye, and set off on our adventure. Two days later we splashed our boat and after a final sea trial, we were official live aboard Loopers.

It was a labor of love, cleaning, polishing, provisioning, and learning every inch of our new home from top to bottom.

SOME OF OUR FAVORITE THINGS

Marriage Savers – We recommend you get a radio headset. We would have never wanted to try to communicate without them.



Headlamp - Jim loved having his hands free when working in the engine compartment.

Folding rolling cart: I used it for taking laundry to and from the laundry room, hauling groceries, and other supplies to the boat.

Bag chairs: Great for concerts, picnics, and dockside pot-lucks.



THE PLACES YOU'LL GO AND THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET

It's really true, it's all about the journey and those that you meet along the way!



Although we had only just begun and are now waiting to go again, what we are looking forward to the most is meeting more wonderful people and sharing this amazing adventure together. At every dock where we stopped, we enjoyed a different sunset, an interesting new town to explore, and saw people enjoying time on the water.

We were greeted by fellow “Loopers” and other boaters as well. We had just docked one day in Saint Ignace, Michigan, when a woman came to our door and offered us a plate of fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies she had baked on her boat. Or the times we watched fireworks from our boat with others in the marina on Friday nights in Mackinaw City, Michigan.



I even enjoyed my time in the laundry room visiting with other women and learning a lot of helpful tricks for the “live aboard” life.

Gold Loopers shared their favorite spots to anchor in Canada and places not to miss along the way. And they were amazing support when we were in need of help or advice.

YES ... it’s definitely the people you meet that make the journey especially sweet!



HOW F.A.I.T.H GOT HER NAME

I shared earlier that I was a “reluctant” participant in this adventure. Even though my father served proudly in the Coast Guard, due to a close call as a kid, I’ve always been a BIG chicken when it came to water sports. So, who do I marry but a man who loves anything that floats!



Well, as they say, “opposites attract!” I was determined that our children would not be influenced by my fears. So, a boating family we became, but I had no idea that something as involved as spending at least a whole year of my life living on a boat was in my future.

Captain Jim knew the way to my heart. I love lighthouses and he promised he would take me (and he has) to see the most amazing lighthouses.

Still, it took a huge leap of faith to get me on the boat. It was because of our faith that we even began to dream of doing the Loop. Only through our faith in God and each other could it have ever happened.

There is a quote by German concentration camp survivor, Corrie ten Boom, that gave us the inspiration for our boat name.

F. = Fantastic A.=Adventure I.=In T.=Trusting H.= Him.

The name has created a lot of interest as we proceeded on our journey. Many people would stop and ask us what it stood for and we would gladly share. But, looking back, we had no idea how our faith was about to be tested.

A LITTLE TOO MUCH ADVENTURE

One beautiful July morning after enjoying stops at amazing places like Mackinac Island, The North Channel, and countless lighthouses, we set off from Petoskey, Michigan, and headed for Leland. The weather reports were good, we had smooth seas and blue skies. Leaving at 7 a.m., we were scheduled to arrive at our destination around two o’clock that afternoon. After a pre-check, the boat was set and the crew was ready. We had an excellent trip when we traveled the course going the other direction, so nothing was expected but a great day on the water. We were looking forward to a bowl of seafood chowder at our favorite restaurant in Fish Town.

Ladies, life happens. Even the best weather reports miss sometimes. When we were crossing the top of Grand Traverse Bay, “Lake Washing Machine” as she was nicknamed last summer, lived up to her name. We adjusted our charts and made arrangements to take shelter at the marina in Northport. We fought the seas the whole way and heard a report from the Coast Guard to watch for large logs. We slowly and carefully watched as we came closer to shore.

With the little town of Northport just coming into view we hit something (it turned out to be a submerged and out of place channel marker). Severe damage was caused to the bow. Steering became even more difficult in the rough waters and we knew we were in trouble.



Captain Jim was amazing as he did what he could to bring us to safety. I called the marina who contacted Northport Boat Yard and they sent a boat out to help us and survey the damage.

Our faithful God and the amazing boat got us to within a 1/2 mile of shore. We were taken to shore so that they could return with pumps and bring our boat to shore to be hauled out.

So many emotions. We were safe, praise God. The boat did not sink but it was damaged beyond repair. A fellow Looper that we had met two days before road a bike over from the marina offering encouragement and to help in any way he could. A wonderful woman and her family offered us their guest house until we figured out what to do next. The staff at Northport Boat Yard bent over backward to help us.

Discouraged? Yes. Heartbroken? Definitely. But we were safe, together and so very grateful.

The following days were very hard. Waiting for the insurance appraiser to give us the bad news that we expected was agonizing. Then cleaning our things off our

beloved boat, the interior was good enough that we could have stayed on her. (This is how the salon looked the day we left her behind.)

We left Michigan the same way we had come nine weeks earlier. In a U-Haul truck full of our things. Our hearts saddened by an interrupted dream, but full of memories from some of the best weeks of our lives.



FAITHFUL STILL

We are home now, planning, praying, and looking forward to continuing our



adventure. On March 12th, we were about to make an offer on another boat but then the pandemic came along. We have traveled to see dozens of boats but none of them have felt right like our F.A.I.T.H. did.

We are scheduled to see six more boats in the coming weeks and believe that it's all part of the adventure. We hope to be back out on the Loop next season

hopefully starting from Florida in early spring. Until then we enjoy the memories, search the internet for prospects, and BELIEVE that our boat is out there and our adventure awaits.

We are considering the following names for our new boat. F.A.I.T.H., Journey, F.A.I.T.H. II, or Faithful Still.

So, my sweet sisters, whether you are planning, in process, or have succeeded one or even more times around the Great Loop. Remember that it's what you make of the journey that counts. Live your life, and have a great adventure.

God Bless You and I hope to meet you out there someday.

~ Julie

I'd love to encourage anyone who may be having doubts about making the trip.

Contact me at juliessong@hotmail.com



Chapter 16

The Gulf of Mexico

Crossing

By Mary Walker

Pegasus

36' Grand Banks

Gold Looper – 2020

I have enjoyed every day on the Great Loop since we started in May 2019, but my greatest fear was thinking about the Crossing of the Gulf of Mexico. I have 13 years of boating experience on Pegasus (our 1988 Grand Banks 36') but I had never cruised at night. To accomplish the crossing of the Gulf of Mexico from Carrabelle to Tarpon Springs, Florida, it means traveling 172 miles. Since Pegasus cruises about 8 MPH, it would take us about 22 hours straight across ... all night long!

When we arrived in Orange Beach, AL, we were reunited with our good Looper friends, Trish/Jaime on “About Time” and Sonia/Greg on “Golden Days”. Then we also met (a new to us) Looper, Dawn/Mike on “Cirlia”. This is when we started looking out/planning and talking about doing the crossing together. The four boats traveled the panhandle together and arrived in Apalachicola on December 24, 2019.

We celebrated Christmas in Carrabelle and decided the crossing day would be December 27, based on the Weather Forecast:

Friday: Winds East/Northeast at 13 knots, with 3-foot waves.

Saturday: Winds Southeast at 10-12 knots, with 2 to 3-foot waves.

But the weather forecasts only got worse for the next 7 days! So, if we are going to go, now was time!

All morning we got ready to start the crossing, making sure all safety precautions were in place, snack foods ready, everything battened down, dinghy cover off, confirmed marina reservations, and systems checked and double-checked. Then at noon, About Time and Golden Daze walked over to our boat to send us off!! Since we travel slower than they do, they gave us a 3-hour head start. Sadly, (but bravely) I waved goodbye to them (hoping we would see them again soon!)

Pegasus left Carrabelle and cruised to the east pass of Dog Island and St. George Island, where we were scheduled to meet up with Cirila. Cirila travels about our speed, and we planned to buddy boat with them. However, they started their crossing from Apalachicola. I finally saw them (with my binoculars) around 1:30 pm. I called them on the radio and told them we were cruising just about 6.5 - 7 miles an hour, (just sipping fuel) ... in order for them to catch up to us. I was so happy when Dawn and Mike were within a mile of us! It was so comforting!

My husband, Jim, and I had already decided we would take two-hour shifts, steering Pegasus (meaning two hours on/two hours off). Also, at the top of every hour, we would do a radio check with our fellow Looper/buddy boats.

At 3:00 pm radio check with Dawn and Mike ... all is good!

At 5:00 pm I checked in on the Radio with Cilia, they too were still doing well. I commented that the color of the water was a brilliant blue. We had about five dolphins dancing in our wake!! It never gets old or boring seeing them play in our wake. We think Golden Daze and About Time are now about 12 miles behind us.

The 6:00 pm radio check: I spoke to Golden Daze and About Time! I was relieved to hear their voices on the radio. Trish was driving this shift. I was also at the helm. We had good conversations at 7:00 pm as well. Golden Daze is four miles behind Cirila. Catching up fast!

At 7:20 pm Jim went down below to get a little something to eat. He heated up my leftover Christmas pot luck dish of mac & cheese and added veggies. After my

shift, I ate a half cup of mac & cheese, just to have something in my stomach. The waves were growing bigger - now 3' (maybe 4') so it's scary going up/down from the flybridge.

8:00 pm and it is SO DARK, I can barely see my hands in front of me. It's comforting to see the red navigational lights from Golden Daze off to our starboard and the white light behind us from Cirila. I still can't see About Time.

A little later on, both Jim and I hear this strange sound! We look at each other in the pitch darkness. Do you hear that? Are we imagining it? Are we crazy? What is that sound? It sounded like two or more Loons off in the distance! Later, we learned that there are Loons in the Gulf!

We check in with Trish at 10:00 pm, and she mentioned seeing the beautiful stars twinkling up above. WOW, it is magnificent to watch the stars become so brilliant they sparkle above us on such a dark night. However, I am trying to just hold on tight and not fall off my seat. I am on duty now until midnight as Jim went down below to take a nap.

The midnight shift and Pegasus is still rocking with waves 3' to 4' and the winds about 9-11 knots. I didn't attempt to go down below anymore, so I pulled a cushion down on the floor of the flybridge, covered up with a blanket, and tried to catch some zzzzzz.

Next up it's 1:00 am to 3:00 am and it's my shift again. Luckily, it's a little calmer, still rocking, but I don't have to use such a tight grip on the handrail. I am cold, so I wrap up in the blanket. I am watching the instrument panel and the clock so I can call and talk to Dawn or Trish at the top of the hour!! Getting sleepy! Must stay awake!!!

Jim is on the 3:00 am to 5:00 am shift. Sunrise isn't until 7:15, but the first light should be visible by 6:30. The sky was clouded over. I was never so happy to see daylight!

Jim was happy for clouds though, so he wasn't blinded by the SUN RISING in the east. He is able to see the approaching crab pots, as we make our turn towards land!

At 8:00 am I am exhausted but jubilant!!! Jim stayed at the helm the rest of the way. I finally got cell service back and my phone was dinging with many text messages wishing us a safe crossing! I never considered I would not have cell service during the night. We still had two more hours to go to get into Tarpon Springs Marina. But I was excited to say: "LAND HO!!!"

Jim backed into a narrow slip at 10:10 am at the Tarpon Springs City Marina. After a 22-hour voyage, it was finally OVER! I was so happy, relieved, and extremely proud! We settled in our slip and then went over to see Cirila and About Time. We called Golden Daze on the phone (as they went to a different Marina) and we all toasted our success with champagne! Laughter ensued when Golden Daze (who has an inside helm station and stabilizers) commented that the Crossing was a "Non-Event"!!



These four Looper boats can brag about crossing on nearly the longest, darkest night possible. It was one week past the solstice, new moon, full cloud cover for most of it, and a bit "sporty". I will never forget this shared experience.



Chapter 17

Couple Issues on the Loop

By Anonymous
Gold Looper 2019

*(Names, dates, and locations
have been changed)*

I love being on the Great Loop and many days are etched in my mind. There are days you will seriously think, “It just can’t get any better than this.” Week after week filled with great weather, endless sunshine, breathtaking sites, and evenings making new Looper friends. Morning coffee never tasted this good, and evening docktails with other Loopers are filled with interesting conversations. Plus, each port of call is an opportunity to explore the town center, visit the local sites, and enjoy a meal with the locals.

You try new foods for the first time and discover Canadian Butter Tarts, Georgia Peach Cobbler, Mississippi Fried Catfish, Maryland Crab Cakes, and Manhattan Clam Chowder. You visit farmers' markets and buy seafood off the “boat”.

Looking back, I remember our first week on the Loop. You start with so many “pinch me now” moments and questions. Did we really pack up the boat, toss the lines and head out on this adventure? How are we going to handle all the locks? What happens if the boat breaks down? Should we have packed more dry goods? Did I pack enough clothes?

If you are like me, you may have also left on your first day with a few silent questions. Will some of the couple issues we had on land also show up on the boat? How is it going to be traveling together for the next three, six, or 12 months?

If you are in the minority and never have any issues with your partner on land, you can stop reading now and skip to another chapter. But if you are like most couples on the Loop, it is not all docktails and beautiful sunsets.

It's a simple fact, Looping couples seem to pack up the same baggage they have on land and move it onboard. And on the boat, it can be worse, as there is less room for your baggage – you can't really space out for “me” time or give your partner lots of time to “get over it”. If on land you have heated conversations, money problems, misunderstandings, and trouble communicating – understand this is all coming with you on the Loop and for some couples, it appears to be even more of a challenge to “fix” while Looping.

Your first step is to know the issue(s) and either decide that you can work with it during your Loop adventure or you might need to consider some professional help – before, during, or after the Loop. I wish there was an old fashion “Marriage Encounter” weekend for Loopers before they started. A pre-trip couple checkup to get you ready for your months or years together 24 /7. I know this might have helped us during our “challenging” times. But as there is no “Looping Couples Encounter” weekend yet, you might have to work on this yourself.

If you take away nothing else from this chapter, I hope you at least understand that your situation is more common than you think. In private conversations with my female Looper friends, I often found that many had issues and at times they felt like there was a disconnect with their partner. How can you be in paradise together doing something you love – boating, and yet still having disagreements and issues? There is really no simple answer.

So, let's look at the most common issues:

1. Communication: For some couples on the Loop this is their first time they are together long-term 24/7. If one or both recently retired or is on sabbatical, the change from working full time to life on the Loop can be quite an adjustment. You go from being apart eight to ten hours a day to full time 100% together. There is no longer an evening meal with questions like “What happened at work today?” or “How is that project you are working on going?” or “Did Jim do another long presentation on customer service?” After your first few weeks on the Loop, you might find it is more difficult to initiate new conversations. What do you talk about or ask when you are together for everything? This might result in long periods of time with “we have nothing to talk about”.



My partner happens to enjoy lots of quiet times. Me, not so much. For me, finding something onboard to fill some of those quiet hours was important. I enjoy reading, but other Looper friends did hobbies like journaling, needlework, jewelry making, painting, and puzzle books.

Most marinas have internet, so many hours were also spent researching the next ports (history, things to do), and of course phone calls to friends and family to chat about the day.

On the Loop you are going to have hours of downtime, be it after dinner or days in port due to bad weather. It's helpful if couples have something each person enjoys doing alone (like reading, online games, boat maintenance, etc.) and some things they enjoy doing together (such as playing cards, board games, musical instruments or watching movies).

Lack of communication in general and limited in-depth conversations is one of the major issues women seem to comment on, especially if the couple is adjusting to life together 24/7 due to recent retirement.

2) Stress – People handle stress differently. Some are quick to react while others let it build up. There is stress on the Loop – planning your route, traveling on a budget, navigating skinny water, working as a team to get through locks, and let’s not forget docking!



If you or your partner lash out when under stress, you might want to consider ways to lessen the stress. You may have seen the T-shirt, coffee cup, or online meme that says “Sorry for what I said while docking the boat”. This always gets a chuckle but it’s very popular for a reason.

As stress is something that can build quickly without warning, it’s not always easy to figure out the best way to address this. At the very least conversations are needed after the fact in hopes that you will learn to handle a similar situation better in the future. Comments like: “That was pretty rough back there, maybe next time we should try X” or “We both didn’t expect to have X happen when we got near the dock. We can try to be better prepared next time” and of course the “I’m sorry I yelled when we did X this morning. Let’s both try to not lose our cool when we do that again”.

3) Anger Management – If your partner gets upset very easily and seems to lash out, you might want to consider reading books regarding this subject. This is not a quick fix on the Loop and might be something that is best addressed before or after the Loop.

4) Uncomfortable conversations in public – Trying to ignore this issue long term, doesn’t seem to help. The best course of action seems to be having a private conversation when you are alone about what was said that bothered you. Most of the time the words or actions are a “carry-over” from an argument or stressful situation that happened earlier in the day or week.

Politics, Sex & Religion - You and your partner need to understand that you will meet Loopers from all walks of life. We found that some conversations in groups were best avoided as they never seem to lead to a consensus.



5) Money Issues – If you are Looping on a budget (and who isn't?) you may find over time that you are spending more money than expected. While most boat owners can come up with at least a decent estimate on fuel cost, maintenance, and dockage, it seems that many Loopers underestimate the cost for food, drinks, and entertainment.



With so many new places to explore and invites from new friends, it's easy to find you are way over budget. It is helpful to come up with a weekly or monthly financial plan that both partners feel comfortable with for restaurant and entertainment spending.

We like to eat out while traveling but tried to limit it to once a day to keep the cost down. And even at once a day, we found our monthly food budget was much more than expected. Some Loopers prefer to only eat out a few times a week to save money. When you do eat out, don't hesitate to ask for separate checks when dining with new friends.

Working on your issues on the Loop

Knowing your issue(s) is one thing but fixing them on the Loop is not so easy. If your partner is open to talking about it, the first step is having a conversation about how you feel. I have Looper friends that tried this and were surprised to find their partner supportive of trying to change specific behavior. But it's a two-way street – he is probably going to want you to work on "X" at the same time.



Let's look at an example that might help

Kate: "I hate it when you yell at me as we are docking. It really gets me nervous and doesn't help to give me the confidence I need as we are about to dock."

Jeff: "It bothers me that you are not ready with the lines when we come into port, I don't understand why you are not paying attention. I expect you to have fenders out and be ready to toss the line."

Solution: How about we talk about our expectations of each other 20 minutes before docking?



Jeff: "Kate, we haven't been to this marina before and I'm concerned about the wind – get 3 fenders out, get a mid-ship line ready, and have an extra line ready if needed."

Kate: "Okay, Jeff, I understand your concern and I'll be ready once we get in. I also will call on Channel 16 and see if there will be a dockhand to assist. If not, let's go through the steps on how you see us tying up at our slip."

The above example helped us work on the stressful docking situation as a team vs. "you didn't do that right".

Professional Help

Some couples agree that they have a problem but they can't together "solve" it. Or maybe you see a problem but your partner is oblivious. Sessions with a marriage or family counselor (before, during, or after the Loop) might be a consideration.



About halfway through our Loop, we had reached a point that we were both uncomfortable with some of the issues that seemed to be repeated over and over. We could continue to try to overlook them and wait to address them when we were done Looping, or maybe it was time to get help. As we were going to be stuck in New York for some time getting repairs, we both agreed to meet with a marriage counselor. We each did one session privately and another four together. Did it work? I'd love to tell you that it was magic and within a few weeks all our issues went "poof". But that only happens in fairytales. But it did 100% help us open up conversation channels and head us in a very positive direction.

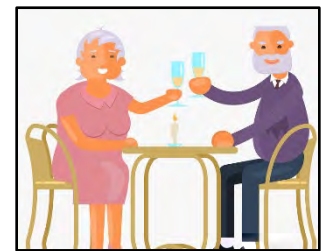
You may not be able to seek professional help on the Loop, or maybe you don't feel your need is quite at that level. Maybe just reading that other Loopers have issues too is enough. I will say it helped us tremendously and was well worth the investment.

Online video (virtual) counseling is becoming more popular and would also be an option for Loopers that are constantly on the move.

Don't have time for sessions with a professional or feel that with some work together you can get things back on track? I strongly recommend you read the following book: *Hold Me Tight by Dr. Sue Johnson*. If both partners can read the book the results can be amazing as it explains some of the patterns of behavior that many couples seem to have.

In Closing –

Understand that if you are having issues, you are not alone in feeling that your relationship on the Loop was not always quite what you were hoping for. Just remember it is never too late to work on it!



For MANY the Loop is an amazing adventure that brought them closer and, in the end, isn't that what we are all hoping for? So, keep the communication door open, look for neutral times to talk over issues, and always make your relationship a priority!



Chapter 18

The Looper

Community to the

Rescue!

By Pat Amidon
Velomer
36' Monk
Gold Looper – 2015

A very strong sense of community exists among Loopers. The white, gold, or platinum AGLCA burgee on the front of the boat signifies fellow Loopers on board. This sense of community is evident in the serendipitous marina conversations, docktail parties, waves, and sound signals between passing boats. It is also a lifeline when a Looper gets in trouble.

Let's face it, smooth cruising through crystal clear water along the scenic countryside and visiting idyllic quaint villages with unique boutiques, charming architecture and lovely informative museums is boring, so I will not bore you with these stories but will regale you with one of the more exciting moments of our Great Loop adventure aboard the motor vessel Velomer!

On June 24, 2015, we started the process of locking up the Trent-Severn Canal, a waterway in Canada, 240 miles long with 44 locks connecting Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay. We had a light day ahead of us intending to go through six locks over 12 miles and spend the night at the bottom of Lock 7. The locks are very well maintained and have at least two attendants, if not three, to facilitate passage. The fills are very gentle and more often than not, you travel through the locks with other boats, often the same boats lock after lock during that particular day. Often locking through is a social event with lots of conversation and merriment.

In our first lock, we met up with several other Loopers, a few of whom we first met at the AGLCA Spring 2015 Rendezvous in Norfolk, Virginia. Our first day was

quite pleasant and enjoyable. That night we moored along the lower wall of Lock 7. The following day was equal in quality as we made our way through the next six locks and 15 miles to Campbellford, located between Locks 12 and 13. The municipality has town docks on both sides of the canal, a lovely waterfront park, recreation trails, restaurants, grocery store, liquor store, and most importantly a chocolate factory.

Due to inclement weather forecasts, we decided to stay here for two days and enjoy what the town had to offer. Our visit included a hike in the rain to Ranney Falls and across the suspension bridge, restocking supplies, and visiting with other Loopers as well as a visit to the chocolate factory where we bought much too much chocolate. Our good times, however, were not to continue indefinitely!

The next day was Monday, June 29, which gave us two days to cruise to Peterborough where we had reservations for Canada Day on July 1. Peterborough Marina is located between Locks 19 and 20, a mere 55 miles and seven locks from Campbellford Municipal Dock, so two days left ample time to make our destination in an unhurried manner, or so I thought. We left the dock shortly after 8:30 AM heading toward Lock 13 just up the canal apiece. The lock was open when we arrived and Velomer entered smoothly pulling up to the front of the port side of the lock where we secured lines to the lock's vertical cables.

Several other boats were cruising toward the lock so we waited for them to enter and get secured. We were joined by Chimera II (a 36' Monk with Jim, Gwen, and Blaine aboard), September (with Ben and Nancy aboard), and Chinook (with Klaus and Elizabeth aboard) as well as two others. Our locking through was a pleasant, social affair with lots of chatter about adventures in Campbellford, and plans for Canada Day. As the boats exited the lock, Velomer was the first out and headed toward Lock 14, one and a half miles away.

The canal between Locks 13 and 14 takes a 90 degree turn to the port and has several islands and a small peninsula jutting out from the port side shore. The charts clearly emphasize the need to stay within the channel as the outside is unforgiving. The canal was literally blasted out of solid granite bedrock. The capital letter R within the waterway on the chart indicates the bottom consists of

rock versus G for gravel, M for mud, or S for sand. As we approached the 90-degree turn with Bob at the helm he said, "PM, can you please take the helm. I need to go below for a moment." Not a problem. We often make this switch.

As I got behind the helm, I quickly pressed the autopilot 10 degrees to the port three times for a 30-degree correction in course. Zilch. Nada. Velomer kept right on going in the same direction. Not to panic, I quickly looked down at the autopilot and realized that the autopilot was not engaged. Again, not a problem, it's happened before. I quickly engaged the autopilot and got us back on track with a few more presses and negotiated the turn. Velomer rounded the bend with ease, smoothly gliding past channel marker T248 to starboard. As Velomer approached the port shore, I again pressed the 10-degree starboard button to correct course. Again, nada! What is going on here? As I was looking down at the autopilot trying to figure out why it was not responding, Velomer slid pass green marker T249. I looked up and saw the entrance to Lock 14 looming ahead.

"Where the heck is Bob?" I said to myself. "He should be back by now. Well, if he doesn't make it back in a timely manner, I'll just have to helm Velomer into the lock." This is a maneuver I had yet to do, but no time like the present. Without warning, I felt a strong thrust upward and sideways and heard a continuous deafening sound. "What the f...?" I said to myself, talking like a sailor inside my head. I saw green marker T251 to starboard and thought to myself, "I'm clearly in the channel so we can't be aground." Then, "Oh sh*t, the green marker is supposed to be to port." At this point, Bob comes scrambling to the flybridge as best he can while the boat is at a 45-degree angle to the horizon, "What the hell...?" The situation became obvious. We were clearly aground. Hard aground. Very hard aground.

Bob jumped into action turning on the bow thruster and moving the joystick to starboard and the bow into the current. Velomer groaned as she teetered. "Are we going to tip over and take on water over the gunnel?" I wondered. It sure felt like it. We both tightly held on to the available railing. Slowly, ever so slowly, Velomer's keel turned and slid off whatever it was that hung us up while she still screamed in pain. As Velomer slid, Marker T251 appeared to port and with a final splash, Velomer was free at last! "Oh, thank God," I said to myself as I suddenly

decided to get religious. I sighed a bit of relief but deeply stressed by whatever damage may have been done.

Bob assessed immediate damage and realized Velomer still floated and possessed maneuverability. Gwen, aboard Chimera II, came over Channel 16, "Are you both all right?" After an affirmative reply, she continued, "That was spectacular. Your hull was out of the water! Damn, I should have taken a picture." Bob slowly helmed Velomer into the lock where we secured the lines to the lock cables. He then went down into the engine room to see if Velomer was taking on water and if there was any visible damage on the inside of the hull. The other boats followed with all aboard asking how we were and offering any support we needed.

The downstream lock gates closed and the lock began to fill. The lockmaster came to the side of the lock where Velomer was tied. He bent his knees to be at eye level with us and gently asked if we were okay. I was still shaking from the experience, still trying to figure out exactly what happened and why. "A bit shaken but okay," I replied. Bob, who was back on deck by this time, entered into a litany of how there was no visible damage on the inside of the hull, how he could still operate the boat but needed to tie up somewhere safe to snorkel and assess damage to the outside of the hull.

The lockmaster replied that we needed to tie up on the port side directly at the top of the lock so that we could give a police report. He witnessed our grounding, saw our hull out of the water, our sharp angle, and immediately called 911 as he thought for sure we must have been ejected from the boat. He also said that due to the current at the top of the lock, this location was not safe for damage assessment.

After the upstream lock gates opened, Velomer limped out of the lock and we tied her up to the port side. The OPP (Ontario Provincial Police) who responded to the 911 call came over and took our report. P.C. Summerfeldt took down our names, birth dates, addresses, telephone numbers, and details of the grounding including time, date, who was at the helm, etc. The event was even assigned an incident number.

After this interview and taking a few deep breaths, we made our way to Lock 15 where the lock mistress directed us to a small embayment to the port of the top of the lock where the current is almost non-existent and we could dock Velomer to check for damages. She also told us that we probably wouldn't find dock space at Lock 17 as it is a very popular place for an overnight stop and typically fills up very early in the day. We were a bit discouraged by this news but decided that if needed we could anchor for the night. I also felt the prospect of getting to Peterborough in time for Canada Day slip away.

Once tied up, Bob donned snorkel gear and dove down. The only damages he could find were three curled prop blades and a scraped keel over its entire length. After departure, we discovered that due to the curvature of the blades, Velomer had no reverse ability, which is a problem when trying to stop forward momentum. We also realized that Velomer could not exceed 5.0 knots per hour (6 mph) without significant vibration.

Just about his time, I began to feel I was an embraced member of the boating community. News travels fast among boating circles and sympathy abounds when it comes to incidents involving groundings and other problematic events for cruisers. As we pulled away from Lock 15 towards the flight of Locks 16 and 17, Ben from the vessel September called on the radio to say that there was dock space waiting for us at the top of Lock 17 and to come on up. Ben had directed the other boats to move a bit tighter together to make room for Velomer. As we left Lock 17, Nancy was on the bow of September with a boat hook ready to take lines from Velomer and pass them onto folks onshore so they could gently pull us into the tight dock space along the wall. I felt we were in tender hands. Once docked and on terra firma, all sorts of folks came up to me to relay their grounding story! To continue with the religious theme, I felt baptized! After all, the Loop is very much like a religious experience.

Still hopeful that we may be able to get to Peterborough in one more day, we left at daybreak the next morning. The route through the Trent-Severn for the day would bring us across Rice Lake and through two locks over a distance of 49 miles. Because we could only cruise at 6 mph to avoid vibration, the trip would take us a minimum of eight hours. Add two locks into the mix and the time increases by at

least another hour if not two. And with no reverse gear, lock maneuvering would be challenging. Surprisingly enough, our day went fairly smoothly making Peterborough without major incident.

We informed Peterborough Marina that we were a handicapped boat with no reverse and needed a slip with no current so Bob could dive and remove the prop to get it repaired. We were given slip B28 which happens to be adjacent to the main pedestrian thoroughfare of the downtown public park where all the Canada Day festivities were to take place. Once securely tied up, Bob went about putting on his scuba gear, setting out tools, and preparing to remove the prop. The marina staff helped by putting us in touch with Kawartha Prop Repair from Buckhorn Yacht Harbor who was willing to come to Peterborough, pick up the prop and return it after repairing it. Life couldn't get any better than this, but it actually did!

Bob's activity of preparing to dive under Velomer to remove the prop attracted much attention from passers-by who became bystanders which gave Bob the audience he has so desperately desired since I think, birth. He was in his element looking trim and sleek in his one-piece dive skin as he donned his BC, the bright pink scuba tank, regulator, mask, fins, and snorkel. Of course, I was on hand to explain why Bob needed to remove the propeller in the first place and was regaled with even more "that's nothing, let me tell you about the time I went aground" stories. My humbled and bruised ego (after all, I consider myself a very competent woman with above-average skills who would never go aground) was beginning to regain confidence. I was beginning to feel as if I have gone through the initiation rite of a not-so-exclusive club as every boater goes aground at some point.



The array of tools dockside included a pair of pliers, two pipe wrenches, a hammer, and an ice pick. Why an ice pick? I have no idea, but it looked good all laid out.

Several of the bystanders became sidewalk superintendents who were very helpful (seriously) in the process. Once all geared up, Bob, with pliers in hand, slid into the water with a splash, waved to the crowd and descended into the water, fading away in the

murk. Every once in awhile, we caught glimpses of pink and bursts of air bubbles along the hull when Bob exhaled underwater. One minute passed, then two and

three. Then five. Bob had explained that removing the prop was simple. All you had to do was remove the cotter pin, unscrew two bolts, remove the prop from the shaft and make sure the prop-shaft key didn't fall into the muck below.

Just at the point of real concern on my part, Bob emerged from the murk, pliers in hand but nothing else. "I'm having trouble getting the cotter pin to come off." The sidewalk superintendents gave several suggestions. With the pliers and a long screwdriver in hand, Bob descended again. Lots of underwater clanging was heard. Five more minutes and Bob surfaced with a twisted, bent, and rather deformed cotter pin. Success! Next, at the recommendation of one of the supervisors, Bob used the hammer applied at just the right angle to loosen the first bolt, then the second. He brought these to the surface and handed them to me. Descending for the fourth time, he took a line with one end attached to the boat, slipped it through the prop, and gently yanked on the line -- the signal to those above to haul the prop up. Ever so slowly, the superintendents raised the prop. As the prop broke the surface, I cringed to see the damage, but I must admit I also experience a pang of pride. I didn't do a half-assed job of going aground, I really went aground! That evening, the prop folks came and picked up the prop with promises of returning the next business day.

Our four days in Peterborough were spent enjoying what the area had to offer. The post prop removal day was July 1, Canada Day, and Peterborough celebrated like no other. The park directly adjacent to the marina started to fill early in the morning with food and trinket vendors. By noon, throngs of people were milling about; downing tasty ethnic food, typical festival fare of hot dogs or sausage, onions and peppers, or cotton candy and other teeth rotting goodies; and viewing various demonstrations of karate, yoga, native dancing, gymnastics and whatever else on the concert stage.

Freya Peterson, the AGLCA harbor host in Peterborough, threw a cocktail party for Loopers that evening, and at 7pm the band Hotel California regaled the capacity crowd with Eagle songs. A very pleasant sense of nostalgia captured our hearts as Bob and I made our way around the sea of people. The evening was made all the more mystical by the rising of the full moon over Little Lake. Shortly after dark, the fireworks began! Bob and I had ringside seats on the flybridge.

The next day was spent figuring out the phone system in Canada, provisioning, exploring Peterborough, and discovering the recreation trails throughout the area. The following day, we took advantage of the bike trails and rode to Lock 21, Peterborough's famous lift lock. That evening, the repaired prop was delivered! We couldn't believe it was the same item. It looked more like a piece of polished brass artwork to display on the wall rather than something you put on the shaft to propel the boat. Saturday Bob reattached the propeller with much less of an audience, but an audience nonetheless. That afternoon, we bid farewell to Peterborough and started heading north once again along the Trent-Severn Canal toward Buckhorn Yacht Harbor where Velomer will be hauled to inspect the hull, shaft, cutlass bearings, and rudder for any additional damage that could not be assessed while still in the water, and to perform fiberglass repair.



We made it to Buckhorn Yacht Harbor to have Velomer hauled passing Burleigh Falls on the way. All the boats that we were traveling with went on to other harbors. The haul took place on Monday, two weeks post grounding. Depending on the extent of damage we would be here for a while longer. We used our time to get in some biking, provisioning, and sightseeing. Bob did more brightwork, I caught up on our blog, and we both got antsy to continue the adventure.

While we waited for our turn to be hauled, we were docked under cover within Buckhorn Yacht Harbor Marina. For a week, we explored the area by bike, were given a courtesy car and drove to Peterborough for a day, ate at all three of Buckhorn's restaurants, provisioned, did laundry, visited the library, went to the community center, met our neighbors, and fought off an invasion of spiders. But our most memorable moments were when we were boarded at night by an intruder, not once but twice. I awoke from a sound sleep about 3:00am and heard footsteps on our deck and felt the boat move ever so slightly. "What the heck?" I thought to myself. I then saw the intruder walk past Bob's side of the stateroom and was taken aback by the light reflected in his left eye. I was a bit unnerved. I shook Bob. "We have an intruder on board," I tried to whisper. We then heard this thumping, then clanging. I jumped out of bed and banged on the wall thinking I may scare him away. It worked! I grabbed the flashlight and shined it on the shore just in time to see a huge raccoon amble off into the bushes. He apparently

reached in under the screen door, managed to catch hold of a shopping bag containing a quart of Epifanes varnish that was sitting on the entry step and tried to pull it out hoping for some tender morsels. That was the source of the noises. He returned the following night. This time we closed the boat doors, so he couldn't get into too much mischief. Bob thinks he just wanted to help with the brightwork.

When Monday arrived, Velomer was hauled. As the hull emerged from the water, everything was looking as it should, no gaping holes, gashes, or overly obvious impairments. Closer inspection proved otherwise. The damage was worse than we had expected, but not nearly as bad as it could have been. The more closely I inspected, the more disheartened I became. The good news was that we were in the right place to get the repairs done correctly. As far as we could tell from the wounds in Velomer's hull, particularly the keel, we most likely grounded on a ledge and as we slid off, the edge of the rock dug into the keel in three stripes along the entire keel's length. The repair process included drilling an inch boring into the back of the keel to drain any water that was in the keel, letting the keel dry out, taking the fiberglass off the keel, and replacing it. Damage also included pitting of the hull where propeller bits or pieces of rock dug into the fiberglass. These injuries also needed repair. And, of course, the damage to the gel coat on the port side that sustained damage because we had no reverse and couldn't avoid contact with several concrete walls of the locks.

When we were first hauled, we were thinking maybe a day out of the water, then two days, then three. Bob and I used our time to take the flybridge cover down and wash all 13 panels and condition the isinglass. We found a large piece of carpeting in the dumpster and fashioned replacement carpeting in the engine room to protect our knees as we crawl about in that area. We also had the opportunity to get to know the staff at the marina really well and meet many other boaters.

On the fourth day, Thursday, we were ready to roll! Velomer looked fabulous with a new brass keel plug, freshly painted keel, a sacrificial 2X4 wooden skeg, repaired gel coat, cleaned flybridge, and new engine room carpeting. Although we would miss the fine folk at Buckhorn Yacht Harbor, we were so happy to be underway again!



Chapter 19

Are You Crazy?

By Cindy Scheer

Aquaman

48' Bayliner

Gold Looper – 2020

The Great Loop conversation started after the guy who worked on our boat in California had disappeared. We learned later he had disappeared to do a boat trip called The Great Loop. “What the heck is that?” we wondered.

This spurred a download of every possible book on the subject. What was this trip? Who does this? How is it possible to circumnavigate a waterway through the center of the USA? Crazy!! Who knew such a trip existed? We asked around and not a lot of Californians know of such a trip. Research began because it piqued our interest. Our friend showed up to our boat with a large binder full of stories his wife wrote while underway. We devoured this book and invited them to dinner to share even more of this journey.



Every night as I was trying to fall asleep my husband read books on the Loop. He was way more intrigued than I was. I thought it sounded fun but the logistics sounded impossible. He would read to me as I lay trying to sleep. We started having frequent bedtime stories and as I listened, I grew somewhat curious. Would this really be something we could do? It sounded really awesome at times and somewhat terrifying.

Our cruising in California had consisted of short jaunts out to the Channel Islands for a picnic and kayak. We rarely spent the night because the Pacific Ocean changes in a blink and in the past, we had gotten caught without warning, rolling,



and tossing all night. I was NOT a fan of anchoring. We loved going to Catalina to hook up to a mooring ball for a long weekend or even a week. It was often crowded and was starting to become pretty developed. We took a few runs up and down the coast to Santa Barbara and San Diego. Our experience was open, deep water. This Loop sounded like lots of shallow waters, narrow canals, sandy shoals, weather, LOTS of weather,

navigating unfamiliar waters, and docking in lots of different conditions at different types of docks. “Sure, sign me up,” I thought. “Seriously, my husband needs a lobotomy. This is NOT going to happen, not with me, anyway.”

It took me a few months of listening to chapter after chapter to reconsider my hard NO! I started to come around. We decided to attend an AGLCA Rendezvous. It was at this event, meeting the people, hearing them share their stories, learning about the great towns along the way and the new territory we’d be seeing, and all the talk of DOCKTAILS that I was hooked! I have always been adventurous and this sounded like quite an adventure.

We came back to California and started to REALLY talk. Not pillow talk, but the real nitty-gritty talk. The hows, whats, and whys. We began telling people what we were thinking about doing. We got mixed reviews. Some said, “AWESOME, DO IT!” Some were full of questions that we weren’t yet able to answer.

The boat you choose to do the Loop becomes a personal decision. There are many types, styles, and sizes. You need a boat that fits your personal style to do this trip. You are basically living aboard for a long time. It becomes your home. It appeared that most people took an average of a year to complete the Loop -- some longer,

some shorter. We decided a year sounded just about right for us.

We learned we had the perfect Loop boat but it was on the West Coast. My researcher husband began boat shopping and deciding what would make us happy. He decided that our current boat was the perfect boat for us. It was hardly used. We had spent 10 years using it as a condo on the weekends. We loved the space. It was actually a little big for two people, but we owned it. Decision made. It was more expensive to sell it and replace it with something as nice on the East Coast. The cost to ship it seemed a better deal vs. the lost equity if we sold it. The next hurdle was how to get it to the East Coast. Anything is possible if you research long and hard enough. We set a date and booked a freighter out of Mexico to Fort Lauderdale.



The next decision was what to do with all our stuff and our home. “What?? Sell everything?? Our home?? All my things?? Are you crazy???” I thought. How in the world can I take 28 years of marriage and all the crap that we had accumulated and just sell it all off? THIS took some time to wrap my head around. We had set a departure date and it was quickly approaching. I had about six months to part with, cry over, sell, give away, and donate all of my stuff. It took me all of those six months and at the end of this time, I had nothing left but what I would take on the boat. (I did store just a few things that I felt were not replaceable and some family antiques and mementos.) The process became increasingly cathartic. As each carload left, I felt lighter and freer. I was getting really excited to think we would be setting off in a few months on this epic life-changing adventure.

The thought of leaving the life I had was terrifying but I was a willing participant. I had agreed to this. I liked my life. I liked lunches with the girls. I loved my yoga studio. I loved my small business selling jewelry in a boutique. What would life on the Loop look like? I have to admit that I was ready for a change and I embraced it. I let go of things like pedicures, hair dye, and makeup. I am now a

grey-haired, plain toenailed, no make-up wearing chick. I am free. I am lighter. I have less stress. I found a sort of confidence in myself I never had before. I was always trying to keep up with the crowd. I LET IT ALL GO!! Maybe you won't struggle with this but this was MY journey to self-love. I found my wings. I let down my guard. I was HAPPY. I found acceptance. Girls on the Loop are totally accepting and wonderful. I found meaningful and wonderful lifelong friendships.

After the boat had been safely loaded onto the freighter out of Mexico, we came back to LA to say our goodbyes. We partied, cheered about our adventure. I began writing a blog so my family could follow us. (www.adventuresofaquaman.com) We loaded up the car to drive across the country to meet the boat. We had 23 days to take our time and explore. This was really the beginning of our journey. We enjoyed the road trip and stopped along the way in places we had never seen. We arrived in Miami and waited for OUR SHIP TO COME IN.

How the heck did this happen? How am I sitting on the top deck of our beloved AQUAMAN on the East Coast? We blinked and felt we were living in a dream.



We spent a lot of time in the euphoric state of disbelief and pure thrill that we had pulled this off. This is about to be the most eventful year of our life. I cried a lot, sweated in the hot Florida sun as we prepped, shopped, and cleaned. We took our car to CarMax and sold it and that marked the very last THING! We headed to the Bahamas.

Here are some thoughts and things I learned from this last year. These are my lessons. These are things I struggled with. I wanted to share my experience and the process it took for me to agree to and prepare for this trip. Everyone's journey is different but I found a lot of girls who struggled with some of the same things. This is my list:

♥ Kitchen Essentials. I packed the boat up with things I THOUGHT I needed for

my style of cooking. Selling my house and all my gourmet housewares was hard. After just a few weeks, I realized that life on a boat was a lot different than life on land. The Panini maker that grills chicken, burgers, and yummy sandwiches shorted out the electrical circuit and caused us much stress to find out what circuit blew and why. Thanks to the GoPro and a long pole, we found we had tripped the breaker on the inverter, which had kept it from blowing up the boat. Bye-bye Panini maker and hello BBQ for all grilling needs. I haven't parted with my milk frother to make lattes or my mini food processor yet, but I have not used them either! You will find your cooking style changes and all the fancy kitchen gadgets you use at home are not necessary. The simplicity I embraced in my cooking style was a nice change.

♥ Who needs 24 plastic plates and matching bowls? Me!!! The great entertainer, that's who. We had a beach house and I took all my beach stuff to the boat. I had plenty of room so, whatever! Now that we are full-timers, space is super precious. On a really good day, where I would entertain or have a party, it would NEVER be 24 people. So, bye-bye sea shell plastic plates. I kept a service for 8, which is still too much. If we do have a party on the dock, the use of paper plates is totally acceptable. I have found that anyone we have over, or who has had us over, uses disposable products and/or reusable containers. This was a little hard for a kitchen housewares queen and a great entertainer. Boat people are usually not pretentious and don't care about using paper products. I have really appreciated the simplicity. It has taken some getting used to. We do not use any plastics. We drink out of stainless-steel cups which are the best for keeping coffee hot and wine cold. We use our pretty plastic plates and wash them. We try to be environmentally conscious. When a large group forms, which is often on the Loop, paper products are just fine!

♥ More on Stuff! When we sold the house and I was packing things up, I made a small pile of important things I wanted around me. A few precious stones, a labradorite heart, an amethyst heart, some quartz crystals, a picture of my kids, and my most favorite bracelets and jewelry. (I am a hippie California chick!) Everything expensive was left safely in a safe with someone. This included my wedding ring. I wore a small band so I did not have to worry about losing it. These things became my comfort. Bringing just a few things was good for

me. Life got super simple. I feel many of us spend our life gathering up stuff. We did for sure! We had a garage full of things and toys. My friends watched me purge and some wondered if I could do it. I did and it felt great. I did cry a little as things left, but it all became so irrelevant later. *Things* seem to cause so much stress. What to do with all the stuff, where to store it, who wants it? It became a burden.

We still have some stuff but I have learned, even after all the purging, that I don't even need as much as I kept! Learning to strip down to bare minimalistic needs is super eye-opening. We are so blessed to experience this life aboard AQUAMAN. Our boat is perfect. It has not let us down. It's our home. I wasn't sure how I would adapt to day-to-day life on a boat. It's great. I love it!



♥ Let's talk about clothes! This is a big, long, and difficult topic for me. A woman whose closet was as big as most people's bedroom is moving onto a boat?? Yes, get the violin ready. Seriously, my friends and family scored! As well as a lot of charities. THAT was hard. Deciding what to keep and store forever, what to give away, and what to bring. I brought too much!! Throughout this year I have given even more away. I still managed to have a few Rubbermaid bins full and a few shrink bags stuffed with clothes in hidden hatches. I really struggled through this one. At the end of the day, I wore the same things and learned that really no one cared. I could have used even less than I brought. I am now a careful shopper.

♥ Make a spreadsheet listing where everything is! Boats have very limited space. Even our big boat was at max capacity. There are hatches and lockers under mattresses and benches. We have used every square inch. "Where is...???" OMG!!!! I have NO IDEA!" It's a totally frustrating disaster. It usually ends in me sweaty and huffing. HOW CAN YOU LOSE STUFF ON A BOAT? Well, guess what? You do! I get so mad!! It is seriously one of my biggest pet peeves. I am working on this. We needed a system AND a spreadsheet. I have an expression that has now become our joke after losing Andy's kite for months. When we found it I said, "It made perfect sense to me when I put it there!" It is

funny and maddening, and sometimes I just throw my arms up and say, “I have no idea!”

♥ Organization. The boat goes from immaculate to a disaster in a few moments. I start opening cabinets and pulling things out that are buried, and suddenly it’s like the clown car where a ton of clowns come out. A ton of stuff is in a pile on the floor and I have no idea where a specific item is and now, I have a huge disaster. It really is hilarious and NOT! A simple day of snorkeling requires gear, towels, sunscreen, bug repellent, water, snacks, hats, extra clothing, etc... We get back and I have a mess. You have to pay to play. Dry the wet gear and wet clothes and return things to the designated cabinets, clean the dinghy, put away the toys. It is exhausting AND exhilarating. This has become my life.

♥ Relationships get tested. Do not agree to this lifestyle if you don’t have a rock-solid relationship with the person you plan on sharing this small space with. It can be really confining and stressful. Our boat has many places to chill. We have several decks if we need to get away from each other. I find that I actually lose Andy. If I truly need a time out, I have places I can go. This hasn’t happened very often. This trip has bonded us. I have met so many couples that say the same thing. It really becomes a team effort. There are days that I want off the boat and some space. This applies to both of us - 24/7 on a boat will test even the strongest relationships. Sometimes at a docktails with other Loopers, the girls break away from the boys and vent. Keeping it real and honest helped me. Constant communication is a must. Some tips from girls who I met along the way included taking a walk, finding a quiet space to read, or walking the docks to find another girl to chat with. Even laundry became a safe space to “get away”! Humor that gets you through those tough days. Also, there is a famous Looper quote, “I am sorry for the things I said (yelled) while we were docking!”

♥ Provisions. In all my homes I have had large pantries. I have been the kind of person who could whip up a dinner for 12 without notice. I have been a pantry stalker, a Costco whore, and a great entertainer. No one in my house went hungry. All my kid’s friends went straight to my pantry, sometimes without even addressing me first. I can make food from anything. It is a real talent that many people envied. My friends didn’t get it, not many people did. Now I live on a

boat. I do not have Costco storage space. It's just me and Andy. I still get heart palpitations thinking someone might stop by and I might need to whip up a meal. Oh man, this has been a tough one. Back to simplicity and only worrying about the two of us. It's a real change. But I focus on how little we actually need. I am shocked by how little we buy and eat on for a week. Is it liberating? YES, but I will always have some pantry items to whip up a hot artichoke dip if need be!!!

♥ Be prepared for anything that can go wrong. Things go wrong. Especially on a boat. Something is always broken or needs attention. You have to go with the flow, seriously! If you can't fix it yourself you need to be resourceful and find someone who can. We keep spares of lots of things onboard. If we hadn't had an extra container of antifreeze we would still be in Bimini!!! We are so lucky that Andy is so mechanical. He has SAVED THE DAY numerous times. I am a great surgical nurse who runs for tools and offers encouragement. We are a great team. You have to flow with it. It's a working vessel in motion that can be very temperamental. Sometimes I find myself grumpy when something can't be fixed or we can't figure it out. I get mad because I like everything perfect and boats simply are not. An example of this is, one super rainy day we had a pretty good water leak. Water was coming into the boat from a window valance and collecting pretty fast. We chased the leak and put bowls and towels down to catch the water. We got frustrated. I cried. The boat got damp and stinky. It wasn't fun. Andy finally figured it out and we sealed it up, but it took some time, a few more rainstorms, and a lot of wet towels! This is just one example of an imperfect boat. They all are.

♥ People on docks are super friendly. If you are on the dock and someone walks past, they almost always say "Hi". People will even stop to ask advice or boating questions. If you have a boat, well then, you're cool. It doesn't even matter the kind of boat. Sail, trawler, sports fisher, or junker. Most boaters will engage in conversation almost all the time. It's a very friendly community. We have been on some really nice boats and we have seen all kinds of boaters. I also notice that fellow boaters will come to your aid without hesitation.

We were anchored in the Exhumes when a dumpy old sailboat ran aground. Several boaters got in their dinghies and raced over. We watched, not knowing if

we should help, but it only took a few minutes and the boat was freed and safely anchored. I have also noticed if you call on the radio, someone is always listening and will respond to a question or request for help. Boaters will go out of the way to offer help. The docks always have people to aid in catching lines and there is almost always someone waiting for your arrival when you call. That was awesome for me when I was learning how to tie up to fixed docks. It is always nice to have an extra set of hands. We fly a Great Loop Burgee and this alone has led to meeting people. Boaters all over the East Coast are familiar with this Association and will either comment on the trip we are on, or they are also doing the Loop. I have downloaded an app called NEBO and this lets us track each other and send messages as we go. Everyone along the way offered great advice about marinas, fuel, restaurants, etc.

♥ Uncharted territory. Living on a boat means we can move anytime we want, wherever we want. We can make the decision to stay or go, any day, at any time. This was the most exciting to me about this boating lifestyle. Andy and I both love the spontaneity. We both hate routine and we get bored going to the same places. After living our whole lives in LA we were both ready to explore new territory. We both had a wanderlust that was bigger than a tropical beach vacation for a week. We both were ready to get uncomfortable. We were totally unstimulated intellectually and spiritually with the day-to-day grind. Andy's retirement was our open door to get uncomfortable and do something bold. I always knew he wasn't the guy who would buy a beach condo and walk the dog every day. I have known for a while that he, like his dad, would follow his dream to see the world. I have been preparing myself for this. We decided not to wait and just do it.

♥ Create a hobby. At home, I had a small business that kept me busy. I made essential oil diffusing bracelets. I sold oils and loved combining the right oils with the right stones for wellness. I packed up all my beads and supplies and closed down my business, or rather put it away for the time being. I realized along the way that I had plenty of idle time and I missed making bracelets.

On a visit back to California, I packed up a small box and sent it to the boat. I loved making jewelry along the way and sharing it with girls I met. I found several

girls who did different crafts aboard. Some painted, some did needlepoint, some ran businesses virtually, some read books. Find something to do that will fill downtime or rainy days aboard. I was much happier when I had something to occupy some time.

♥ Laundry. Our boat had a washer but it was more hassle than it was worth. I preferred taking it all up and doing multiple loads at once. I found laundry rooms along the way to be a safe space to escape the boat. Laundry rooms always have women in them. Rarely do you see guys doing laundry (Sorry but it's true. Although there were some exceptions, it was rare). If I needed conversation, I would hang out. I found very often other girls were also looking for conversation and it always made doing laundry less mundane. If you see a girl in a laundry room by herself, hug her or talk to her. She most likely needs it.

I wouldn't trade the year we did the Loop for anything. It was a year that pushed me beyond all my comforts. It tested me beyond any life lesson I previously had. It was the most challenging year of my life. But it was the BEST year of my life. I learned so much about myself. I let down walls and barriers. I learned to love myself, flaws, and all. I stopped caring about all the little things that filled my thoughts in my everyday life. Every day was an adventure filled with new places, and experiences. The places we saw changed me. I am still not sure why this happened. Some days were not easy, but most were glorious. I relaxed and was able to be in the moment. The distractions of a busy life at home disappeared. I was told when I attended the Rendezvous that the people make the trip, the friendships you make are life-changing and the experience will be unforgettable. It is 100% true.



There is a saying that after the trip you will need Weight Watchers and AA. That is true also. We ate our way through all the wonderful towns and the local cuisine. We drank our fair share at docktails chatting with fellow Loopers. It was wonderful. It was the trip of a lifetime.



Chapter 20

We Figured it Out

By Barbara Morrow

The Blessing

35' Silverton

Gold Looper – 2019

What an amazing adventure that two kids from Canada embarked on. After retiring from our careers (Jay, a policeman of 27 years, & myself, a Laboratory Technologist of 30 years) we were ready for an adventure. Well, I wasn't so sure. I wasn't negative, just not sure. While I did very much enjoy driving around the country looking at all kinds of boats/yachts, I never believed it was going to be us living this dream in the very near future. We had looked at boats for five years, but God had a plan. A plan for us to see the country, by water, on a 2000, 35' aft cabin Silverton. She was a beauty in our eyes. We fell in love with her from the beginning. Our first week was just cleaning and I mean deep cleaning. We hired a boatyard cleaning service to help & give me some tips on the canvas, eisenglass, and many other tips. Our baby, The Blessing, had been sitting in Nashville and used as a floating condo for 18 years. Yes, she was clean on the surface, but we needed to put our seal of approval on it. Once clean to my standards, the learning began in other areas ...



Every day was a learning experience. I never knew I could be so exhausted, mentally & physically. Sunrise to sunset we worked on the boat and learned non-stop. We hired boat coaches to teach us the basics of docking, locking, and anchoring. Our first lesson was

NEVER DRIVE FASTER THAN YOU'RE WILLING TO HIT SOMETHING.

The Blessing was 35' of beautiful fiberglass. I was so scared of putting our first mark on it. *I should put fenders everywhere*, I thought. Not only did we not have enough, but I also had to learn how to tie the proper knot so I could move them really fast. It wasn't until we were going to go through the locks that we bought more fenders and a fancy clip that allowed for fast relocation.



We were determined to learn every inch of our boat, and how it worked. During the survey, we learned so much. The gentleman that did the survey for us was amazing. He was open to us asking questions and shared information as we went along. His list of recommendations was not too long, but it was a list, nonetheless, for us to start on. We made many trips to hardware/marine stores to get replacement parts, etc. YouTube was watched frequently and the many friends we met along the way put up with our many questions about this and that.

Docktails, a new concept for us, was about making new friends, eating, socializing, and listening to everyone's experiences and deciphering what information pertained to us and we could use.

Our thanks to Captain Chris and his set of starter DVDs. We watched these over and over again. I bought these before the purchase of the boat and we continued to watch them throughout the Loop, as needed.

(BOAT: Break Out Another Thousand) rang true to our ears. Nashville, where The Blessing was waiting for us, was 100° F in June when we purchased her, and the humidity was nothing we had ever experienced before. We were excited to be in a covered marina with electricity and The Blessing had two air conditioners. But we found out on day two of being on the boat, while waiting for our boat coaches to arrive, that the loud grinding, clunking sound, was the air conditioner dying.



What were we going to do? We never considered not getting it repaired. We would sweat the minute we opened the salon doors at sunrise. So, no question it was being repaired. Unfortunately, the marina service department was backed up which forced us to look elsewhere. Did I mention that marina people are the best, and so friendly? Within hours we had the phone number of a repair guy and on day three it was being fixed. BOAT x 4.



During our week of cleaning, I would not even let Jay start The Blessing until our coaches had arrived. I knew things had to be checked before starting like the oil, seacocks, etc., and what if we missed something? Paranoid, I know. I had no idea how we could do this. Jay just kept saying, “We’ll figure it out.” This was our very first boat and even though we felt we were smart and fast learners, we really knew nothing and I wasn’t ashamed to admit it. Jay figured since he knew how to drive police cars, motorcycles, and semi-trucks, “How hard could this be? We’ll figure it out.” We spent a month or so getting to know The Blessing while docked in Green Turtle Bay and taking the boat out daily, but returning to our slip at night. We were so glad the marina had a pool, which was a great place to unwind and cool down. Then, we got brave and went to an anchorage for a night. I remember watching fireworks on July 4th from our wonderful spot.

The next morning, we experienced the anchor getting hung up on something. What are we going to do?? Scared to pull too hard, we had our boat coaches on speed dial. We called a friend who offered a few encouraging words and simple suggestions of rocking back and forth, and we were freed. But a plastic part in the windlass had broken, so we got on a computer and ordered one. A plastic piece. So, we bought two. We had heard the importance of having spare parts. And yes, we did go through even the spare over the next few months, only to find out months later that a steel one could be ordered and never cause us problems again. I knew we would anchor a lot and this was important to figure out.

While docked in Green Turtle Bay, cruisers on the boat next to us, now good friends, offered me some awesome advice. Elizabeth said, while shaking her finger at me, “YOU LEARN TO DRIVE THE BOAT.” I wanted to, I think, and on our day trips, I would practice. In big open water or small little bays, I worked on maneuvering the boat. The Blessing was not equipped with thrusters or other fancy equipment. Two engines & two throttles. I remember pulling into a fuel dock at Joe Wheeler, extremely slowly, no wind, perfect conditions, and I did it! So proud of myself.



I learned to read the charts and the navigation along with my husband. We would study at night and use every situation, good or not so good, as a LEARNING experience. I didn't want to be along for the ride, I wanted to be a part of it. It was important for me to learn how to change the oil, check the oil, do the maintenance, be better at throwing lines, tying knots, securing the boat. Even repairing the bilge pumps and the hot water tank. The list goes on.

One thing that was going to be very important to learn was locking. You could go through over 140 locks on the Great Loop. When we had our boat coaches with us aboard our “new to us boat”, we only had the opportunity to go through one lock. For the most part, I stood back and WATCHED. It seemed to go pretty smoothly.

One day while at Green Turtle we decided to go through the lock that is right there - the Barkley Lock. You know, just to DO ONE to practice. Well, these locks can be very busy with commercial traffic, which get priority over us small recreation vessels. Unfortunately, the day we decided to go through, the lockmaster said he was waiting on a barge and it could be an hour or so wait. Change of plans, we would try again tomorrow. I was off the hook.

The next day, it would just be a short wait. So, as we are sitting waiting, I'm going through everything in my mind. We had watched the Captain Chris DVD the night before, plus many YouTube videos. We got this, I thought. Jay, being the excellent driver he is, is taking his time, going slow. I'm sitting on the bow with gloves on, lifejacket, knife in the pocket, and lines ready. Oh, and I must mention the boat hook, in my left hand. My heart was racing. How was I going to catch this thing called a bollard? And if I miss then Jay has to maneuver the boat back to another bollard.



Then I noticed I forgot to put the fender out to protect the bow. I let go of the boat hook & it flew off the bow, into the water below. Oh no, now what? I was trying not to make a big deal of it, as Jay was concentrating on driving and didn't notice. We approached the bollard. Jay said, "Can you reach it?????" NO, I missed the first few throws with Jay working hard to keep the boat close to the wall,

probably having to reverse and re-approach. I was hot, very hot and those fish flies were like nothing I had ever experienced. I had to keep my mouth closed or I would have swallowed one for sure. We kept trying. With the next approach to the bollard, I looped the line around and held tight. We let the lockmaster know we were secure. I was stressed, holding on for dear life. Down we went for maybe 15-20 minutes. Once we had permission to untie and leave the lock, we went a little way on the river and stopped (I can't remember if we anchored or not). I didn't

want to ever experience that again.

I sat on the floor with tears in my eyes, for about 10 minutes. I was mad at myself, for not getting the bollard hooked the first time. The trouble was, to get back to the marina, we had to go back through the lock. I had to pick myself up, with lots of encouraging words from Jay, and prepare again. We talked about what to do differently. I LEARNED a lot that day.

Going up was much smoother and I felt way better about the whole situation. I learned that I needed to believe in my Captain. He could get me to the exact spot to catch the bollard. I didn't have to be frozen in one spot. I had the whole bow I could walk along, why not start at the very front of the bow and walk back to the midship when catching the bollard? This may only make sense to me, but it worked. That night we were off to the ship store to purchase not just one but two boat hooks. We also talked to my new friend when we



returned to the dock that night and she showed me how she held the line and caught the bollard every time. Any piece of information was going to be helpful. I couldn't give up. We would be going through many locks. I am so happy to report that this experience of WATCH ONE, DO ONE, TEACH ONE, REPEAT has been amazing and I feel very confident going into a lock now.

Having never owned a boat, and having only rented a small pontoon boat a couple of times at “the lake”, our initial plan was to practice for a year and start the Great Loop the following year. Well, things have a way of changing in the boating world. (The worst thing you can have on a boat, is a schedule.) With our boat in Nashville and our home in Manitoba, Canada, I could not see ourselves using it as a condo, commuting 24 hrs one way, just to spend a few days or weeks on her. Too much travel just to sit on her, on a lake for summer learning. Learning what?? I don't know. Maybe anchoring? There are no tides, no currents. If it was windy, we could just stay on the dock and never be forced to get out of our comfort

zone -- nothing like we would learn if we just started. So, one beautiful evening over a lovely glass of wine I said to Jay, “Why not start this year?” He was excited & I thought, “Oh no, what have I done?”

One thing is for sure, we would continue to learn all along the Great Loop. Anchoring in the lake was going to be different than in the Bahamas. And what about Georgia and South Carolina where the tides changed 8’ or more. Going down the Tenn Tom was pretty peaceful, with no wind, no current, and no tides. How were we going to figure out docking with a current or the wind blowing us around like a



beach ball before we got tied up at a dock? I learned that we wouldn't have it figured out before leaving on an amazing adventure. Every day was a new



experience. We had to be open to suggestions, and studying and learning along the way. Never in my 57 years of life have I ever cared about wind and waves, but now there are apps on my phone for this. Quickly, I was able to learn what it all means and at times, checked them frequently.



Never did I ever worry about “US” on the year-long adventure. We were a solid team and had faith that God was in control. There are difficult times, stressful times, and that take a toll on your emotions. Maybe we would disagree about something, but we made sure that our emotions could not affect our decisions. We would not stay mad at each other. We both had to be together, united on all decisions. I, being the more cautious, nervous, scared - played it safe in all situations. Safety was # 1, and I thought about it always. I remember one time that the winds were howling and our anchor wasn't holding and I would have rather curled up in the cabin, but I was

better than that. We were a team and if I had to go on the bow to bring up the anchor and reset in a rain and wind storm while Jay was at the helm, then I had better put my big girl panties on and get the job done, or I would have to be at the helm, and I was away more comfortable setting the anchor. We figured out our roles and did them well.

It truly was an AMAZING adventure. Through the whole year on the Loop, we had three kinds of days.... some were GOOD, some were GREAT, and some were AWESOME. I feel blessed to have had this opportunity.

I loved the experience we had and the knowledge I gained along the way.

The friends we have made -- PRICELESS!!

That's why it was an Amazing Adventure, not a vacation. Just do it.

You'll figure it out. We did!





Chapter 21

Baby Boat – Big Adventure

By Sarah Vince

In-Vince-ible

27' SeaRay

Looper in Progress

How and why did my husband and I decide to do the Loop in a 1998, 27' Searay? We started looking for a bigger boat but they all came with a monthly payment and we didn't want that. Familiarity reduces stress (we like low stress) and believe me, we know our boat. We will get our big new boat afterward, at least that is our plan. So, since we were told to take the boat you know, this is why the boat, In-Vince-ible (that we have owned for 21 years) is the boat we made Loop Ready.

Now you know the "Why". Let's get to the "How". Every inch of In-Vince-ible needed to be used and used wisely. I started by removing silly, nonsense items that we just didn't need on her. I measured areas and bought clear tubs with lids and placed like items in each tub. We used heavy adhesive Velcro to secure some tubs in some areas. Since we need to take items down below with us at night (up top is not secured due to it being just canvas). We have one tub that holds our up top "Travel Day" items. For example- binoculars, handheld radio, the tablet we use for Navionics, a small whiteboard with travel day marina listed, phone number & information, extra sunglasses, non-skid pads to go under our dock steps, pocket knives, tissues...



Advantages of a baby boat: docking and locking seem to be easier with a smaller boat. We are able to maneuver into smaller slips (cheaper) and around, into and out of tight areas more easily. Marinas can take smaller boats when they can't take larger ones. Fuel costs can be lower and we have less draft.

You can't take it ALL with you: traveling the Great American Loop is not part of a beauty contest. You don't need fancy clothes or even many clothes at all. You do need cool weather clothes and warm weather clothes. One tub can have really warm clothes since you will need them occasionally. Layering clothes is the best way to stay warm and you can quickly and easily remove layers as needed.

Everything has a place: everything on board must have a designated place. If not, items get lost or your small space becomes cluttered and feels smaller. Keeping your boat tidy helps keep frustrations lower.

What about cleaning clothes? There is a miniature washing machine for that. We love clothes dried by the sun so we bought a small washing machine that we keep up top. It washes & spins clothes. We then hang items up top to dry. Not once on the Loop did a marina ask us to remove items hanging out to dry and we only had one marina with rules of no hanging anything (even towels) out to dry. If you don't have room for a washing machine on board, most marinas have laundry.

Food/Meals: we buy canned or pouches of food (tuna, salmon, chicken, beef) to keep on board. Example- microwave mac & cheese, brown rice (individual cups), SPAM, Vienna Sausages, peanut butter, Trail Mix, dried fruit, crackers, individual packets of oatmeal. Remember to keep your meals simple and easy. We eat a lot of hard-boiled eggs, so like at home, we have a small egg cooker on In-Vince-ible. It

also makes mini omelets or poached eggs. It's tiny and easy to clean. At every marina buy fresh fruits and vegetables even if you don't need many. Yes, we keep bananas on our boat. We always have and we always will keep bananas on board.

Comfort and safety getting on and off a baby boat are super important: you will come across many different types of docks so having good sturdy steps is very important. We bought a toolbox/step. We filled it with MANY different small tools & use it inside In-Vince-ible. We then have a two-step that we place on the dock to step onto when getting off the boat. This step is hollow so we can fit it over items already up top on the boat.

The most important things for us on our baby boat...

Me: My Bible and headphones. To give me "My Space" I put my headphones on and listen/watch my Daily Devotionals, videos, or movies. Sometimes I leave my headphones on just to show I'm having "My Time".

Captain: he loves having a TV and electric cooler for his beer.



Be prepared to rub elbows with your captain: If you haven't already, I recommend doing things together in a confined space to familiarize yourselves with being close ALL the time. Share a small bathroom... learn to give each other space even in small areas. Say thank you often - it goes a long way in small spaces. Be kind and loving because remember, you will be together in close quarters for a long time. Touching each other and kissing helps keep small areas from seeming too small.

"Let emotions subside before you decide." When docking or locking emotions tend to become

strained. Remember to listen to your Captain and only second guess him if the situation might become dangerous if you don't say something. If it seems he's barking orders remember this, he too, may be scared, worried, and stressed, but might not admit it. Don't let your feelings get hurt over what is said during docking and locking.

Communication is important. We have found that when handing something to each other we say, "Got it." So, each of us knows it's ok to release the item.

Change negative to positive: Your tiny space can crowd you out when you are negative about everything. Just repeat- "It's all part of the Adventure" to help you get through tough situations.

Big Adventure: This is a trip of a lifetime. You will have good and bad days. But remember that there is a very limited number of people that get the opportunity to take this trip (even in a baby boat) each year. You are special – enjoy the ride!

We use our faith in God to support each other. Love is not a feeling- Love is what we DO!





Chapter 22

What's your name?

By Reenie Boyer

Thistle

40' Mariner Europa

Gold Looper – 2018

Yes, Ladies, your boat's name will become your name for the entire Great American Loop and possibly long after! It's a good thing, just be aware when choosing to name or rename your boat. It's okay to let your imagination go wild or silly here because there are truly an infinite number of possibilities.

The Loop is an adventure, journey, escape, lifestyle, accomplishment, and more. Remember when naming your boat, it is your Loop home. What name you select reveals a lot about you to fellow Loopers. Once your name is selected, the commitment must be carefully assessed before application to the boat.

Imagine out loud what your name will sound like when you are broadcasting on the radio. You will use your boat's name to hail the Harbormaster for a slip assignment or contact the Coast Guard requesting assistance. Everyone nearby will hear your transmission and associate you with your boat's name. You probably don't want it to be embarrassing or offensive.

Naming your boat is a maritime tradition and rumored to bring good luck! Thousands of years ago, boats were traditionally named after gods, goddesses, saints, or family. According to myth, every boat's name is recorded in the "Ledger of the Deep" by Poseidon, the Greek God of the sea. Also, according to myth, it's okay to rename a boat, but to stay on Poseidon's good side, but you must remove every trace of the old name from your boat.

In ancient times the crew of any boat with a new name obviously painted over the old were considered pirates. The first reference to the name changing a boat comes from Long John Silver in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. "What a ship was christened – so let her stay."

Our Great American Loop dream started differently than most. I was attending a work conference along with the river system and met a couple on their boat with an interesting burgee. After a few minutes, I learned about the Great American Loop and the AGLCA (the interesting burgee). I called my husband, Greg, and asked him if he knew about the Great American Loop? No, and he thought that I might be confused because the 5,000-mile boat trip didn't seem geographically possible!

Greg & I studied the Great American Loop and discovered it was definitely possible, and soon became AGLCA members. Both of us were actively searching for a trawler, and found THISTLE the same day. Online she looked perfect, meeting almost everything on our checklist.

We made a plane reservation to fly to the east coast to see THISTLE in person. After an inspection, sea trial, offer and acceptance, she was ours!

We enjoyed one-week aboard THISTLE and then tucked her in for the winter. We traveled home with a big smile and a long to-do list. Our plan was to start the Great American Loop the following spring.

To tell the truth, our to-do list was overwhelming and we were both (me more so) superstitious about changing THISTLE'S name. So, by default and lack of time, we kept the name. We liked the name THISTLE but didn't think we had a connection.

As planned, we started our Loop the following spring. The journey continued to meet and exceed all of our expectations! Especially the camaraderie we formed with other Loopers. Yes, we were called "THISTLE" and addressed other Loopers by their boat's name. Quite often we noticed that a Looper's boat name frequently matched the owner's personality.

I personally found the friendships formed with other Ladies on the Loop to be one of the most rewarding aspects of the entire experience. Our communication with each other became a big part of daily Loop Life. We were all experiencing something new, different, exciting, unexpected, and at times unnerving. This unique Loop bond brought us together with fresh ideas, trust, and loyalty. The joyfulness I felt was like going back to summer camp as an adult!

Looking back on our Loop journey, the moments that I cherish the most are ones with friends. As friends, we made a choice to allow each other into our comfort zone during Loop Life. Not all your Looper Lady friends will withstand the test of time and distance, but some will! A special “ahoy” to my Looper Lady friends: Tyre-less, Mother Ocean, Observer, Skinny Dipper, Don’t Think Twice, Gettin’ Looped, Lab Partners, Gypsies Palace, One-Eyed Dog, Shell Bell, Firestorm, Pura Vida, Ned Pepper, Seaquest, State of Bliss, Donna Mae, Knot Kidd’n, Salty, Loofah, Vahevala, Patriot and Blue Willow.



THISTLE & TYRE-LESS

Like back in summer camp as a youngster, sometimes you get lucky (reason to stay on Poseidon’s good side) and find a Best Looper Lady friend. THISTLE was very fortunate to meet Tyre-less on the Loop. We initially found it easy to talk, laugh, spend time together, share common interests, and expose each other to new things! While traveling the Loop, our friendship just made life better. As a Best Loop Lady friend, Tyre-less also continues to challenge me to get out of my comfort zone, volunteering to write this story is a great example. Even though we reside in different countries and live almost 5,000 miles apart we enjoy sharing time, pictures, laughs, and thoughts together. It is especially nice that our Captains also enjoy each other’s company. It’s so true, a good friend knows all of your stories, a best friend lived them with you!

We are now Gold Loopers (2018) and spent the summer of 2019 with our buddy boat Tyre-less, and also completed the Triangle Loop. We have enjoyed seven years with THISTLE, and she has more than lived up to her name.

THISTLE: A strong plant that clearly connotes bravery, courage, and loyalty. Throughout history the flower has been adopted as a positive emblem, cultivating unique stories that tell of the past heritage.

At first, we didn't think that we had a connection to the name THISTLE. After starting the Loop, we discovered that THISTLE was Greg's great grandmother's maiden name. Guess it was meant to be!

Just remember Ladies, you are your boat's name. Off the water, I am, Reenie from Hawaii, but onboard I am "THISTLE". To this day I am proud to wear a THISTLE broach bestowed upon me by Tyre-less, in honor of our boat's name and friendship.

Aloha

looplifewithgregandreenie.blogspot.com

- **T** Take your **TIME** to enjoy the Loop (we were slow Loopers).
- **H** Your Loop boat is your **HOME**, Sweet Home.
- **I** **AGLCA INFORMATION** and Loop blogs are invaluable.



THISTLE



MY THISTLE BROACH

- **S** Docktails with Loop **STORIES** are always fun.
- **T** Be **THANKFUL** on the Loop and remember, always safety first and safety last.
- **L** Your Loop **LADY** friends are the best!
- **E** The Loop is truly an **EXPERIENCE** of a lifetime, make it uniquely yours.





Chapter 23

Lake O and Beyond

By Laurie Edgerly

Oar Knot

34' Mainship

Gold Looper – 2018

Oar Knot proudly crosses her wake! At 11:26 AM on New Year's Eve morning, 2018, Oar Knot returned to her homeport of Cape Harbour in Cape Coral, FL, crossing her wake and completing America's Great Loop after 304 glorious days. It was simply a wonderful adventure but how do I truly describe these amazing ten months? In response to the query about what was their favorite part of their Loop, most Loopers cite the people met and friendships built. That is overwhelmingly true, but not complete. I think it is also moving outside your comfort zone and successfully meeting many varied challenges along the way. We feel changed, calmer, more confident, proud of our accomplishments, and in an even deeper, stronger marriage.

America's Great Loop's final destination is also your beginning point, so it must be the journey and all the adventures in between that makes it so uniquely a voyage beyond anything I could have imagined. Both Jim and I grew up in small shore towns, he in coastal New Hampshire and me at the Jersey Shore, so we knew we loved the sea. I had spent many days on boats since I was a toddler, but only as a passenger and never really learned much about maneuvering, navigating, or any of the myriads of boat skills we would soon acquire. Jim's boating experience was limited to several small fishing boats, including 10' and 12' Jon boats and culminating in a 14' Deep-V fishing boat with a 4 cylinder 9.9 HP outboard. Several years before my retirement, we took the Coast Guard Boating Safety

Course and began our introduction to boat systems, rules of the road, navigation, weather, and many other new skills. From that point, we continued reading, researching and planning. We sold our home and its contents to head for Florida to begin our adventure. The next step was to further our training before we could begin our search for a boat.

We took a week-long live-aboard course with a yacht training school where we learned docking, anchoring, charting, boat structural, mechanical and electric systems, USCG required safety equipment, knot tying, tides and currents, marine radio use, proper fueling procedures and the proper action to take when a vessel is aground (and it will happen). We then found Oar Knot, our beloved Mainship 34 trawler, and hired the training school captain for an additional week to continue our lessons aboard our new floating home. We spent most days between November 1st and March 1st practicing what we learned during daytime cruises, repeated docking practices, and even a few overnight anchorages. We also prepared the boat and provisioned her well while anxiously awaiting our departure to begin our Loop! We had a wonderful send-off from our dock mates as we dropped lines and pulled out, transiting our first mini lock at the entrance to our marina - the Chiquita Lock.

We spent our first night in LaBelle on the Caloosahatchee River where we were introduced to the visiting alligators and the strange guttural sound I never knew they could make. Our second night was in a marina near Moore Haven waiting for a spot at the infamous Roland and Mary Martin's Marina & Resort ("resort" is used loosely here). We enjoyed gator bites and hush puppies at the Tiki Bar before retiring early as we'd be crossing the 25-mile Lake Okeechobee (Lake O) the next morning to arrive in Stuart, reaching the East Coast of Florida. But the first lesson to learn about the Loop is that the plans we make are as fluid as the water we sail in. One must always be prepared to be flexible and adapt.



We found Lake O to have a bit of a chop that morning, but not too much and we quite enjoyed several hours crossing under sunny skies. We were hailed from a passing sailboat to inform us that our dinghy had slipped from the davit and was taking on water. I thanked them as Jim headed down to assess the situation and solve the problem. He donned a life jacket as he stood on the swim platform bailing out the dinghy. When it was emptied enough to hoist back up onto the davit, he made the best jerry-rigged temporary fix possible.

Meanwhile, I, at the helm, kept us circling just off the channel. When Jim felt it was time to test the now secured dinghy he said, “Put us back on the magenta line and get us out of here.” I slowly proceeded back on course within the channel heading east towards Stuart and the Atlantic. Jim remained in the cockpit for about twenty minutes more keeping an eye on the dinghy to be sure it would stay fast. When he returned to the flybridge, he said it looked okay for now but we’d continue at a slower speed just in case and he planned to work on it at the marina that evening. Our boat came with a davit that was not a perfect match for our new dinghy but Jim had made it



work. We had four extra-large four-foot-tall fenders which would come in very handy in the numerous locks we would encounter, though they took up too much space in the cockpit or the back of the flybridge. We had a suggestion from another boater to stow them in the dinghy. Well, after a few hours of bouncing in the middle of Lake O, the weight was too much and the dinghy slipped off the straps and began taking on water. Luckily that sailboat warned us, and we did not lose the dinghy, or any of the fenders.

After several more hours of delightful cruising, we felt pretty good about ourselves and began to think we were becoming real Loopers. As we approached the

eastern shore, we were in sight of Port Mayaca Lock, so I hailed the lockmaster on channel 13 repeatedly and also tried on channel 16. With no reply, we continued getting closer until we could see the lock door was open as well as the other side of the lock was wide open. We tried again on both 13 and 16 but to no avail, and finally decided that we could proceed through the lock as it was open on both ends.

We turned the corner coming out of the lock and it was just like we crossed into The Twilight Zone. There, dead ahead of us, was the identical twin of the marina we left just four hours earlier! It was so identical it even had the same name! You probably know by now that I had found our course again and followed that magenta line perfectly but instead of heading east, I had turned us around heading back west. The dockmaster was there awaiting our return but clearly laughing heartily. He of course had heard my calls for Port Mayaca Lock since I had used channel 16 and he knew before he caught sight of us just what had happened.



In my defense, if there could be any at this point, Jim had spent about 45 minutes down on the swim platform as I kept us circling. Just before we were ready to get underway, two trawlers passed by which I had radioed to let them know we were hovering just to the side of the channel. They checked to make sure we didn't need any assistance and they continued on their way which for some reason I thought they were heading towards the western shore. As a result, I carefully turned us in the opposite direction than they were traveling. Of course, you might think that there were plenty of signs to alert us that we're heading back to Clewiston and not Stuart. There was obviously the large compass in front of my nose. We might have noticed the direction of the sun, but the trip back was around noon so the sun direction was mostly overhead. We were just so thrilled to be out on the water for our first big crossing. The relief that we had solved an issue without any damage or loss also contributed to our lighthearted mood.

Now you are probably wondering how this tale is a good choice to share with ladies in the planning and dreaming stage. Well, it is not to frighten you away but rather, illustrates several points about how unpredictably a very well laid out plan may unfold, how we relied on each other right from the start of this journey, how we could laugh at ourselves and accept that we had much to learn (many would have never shared this foible) and that the most unexpected turns may become the best of your entire Loop. So, by returning to Roland and Mary Martin's Marina we were docked much earlier than if we had managed to arrive in Stuart, giving more hours before sunset to further make repairs on the davit. I went on a walk and found the most delightful little Mexican restaurant for dinner that night. The "Lake Okeechobee Incident", as we like to refer to it, spread throughout the Looping Fleet of 2018. So much so that while in Killarney, Ontario, when we were introduced as being Oar Knot, a couple of Loopers excitedly said they had heard of the story and hoped to hear the account directly from us.

The most important outcome of "The Lake Okeechobee Incident" was meeting three Looper boats that we would travel with and remain lifelong friends. Were it not for spending a second night at the marina we never would have met Ken and Ruth on Horizon, Bud and Sue on Odyssey, and Mike on Dash Away. We all crossed the lake in the morning and all found slips together in Stuart. Later we spent a week with Bud and Sue and had some adventures including a trip to the Kennedy Space Center. We visited with them while they wintered in Fort Myers and have stayed in touch as they continue Looping in segments. We didn't see Ken and Ruth again until the Hudson River where we became buddy boats all the way through the Erie Canal and into Canada. And we met Mike, who was single handing Dash Away, on and off countless times throughout the trip. Seems like Dash Away was with us at all the important sights along the way from Charleston SC, the Chesapeake, Cape May, and Atlantic City to circling the Statue of Liberty, the Trent Severn Waterway in Canada, and more. He was just ahead of us when he crossed his wake in Northport, MI but after a rest, he met up with us again as he rounded into his second Loop. He turned up again and again in many a port including Ottawa, IL to Clifton, TN, and Iuka, MS. Most special to us was that we met on the first days of our Loop and then we traveled the last few weeks together so, he was with us for our wake crossing. We ran into Mike in Carrabelle and left

with a group of eight boats for Steinhatchee. It was just Oar Knot and Dash Away for the next few weeks until our return to Cape Coral. Seemed like a perfect circle to share both the beginning and end of this incredible Loop. We've been able to visit again this winter season and I'm sure we will meet yet again.

I remember being asked by fellow Loopers on Kara Mia what was our go/no-go top windspeed. It definitely increased as we accrued more miles behind us, but with our starting point in March along the east coast of Florida, well, March winds bring Loopers to a halt, as the old saying goes. With Kara Mia's starting point in Nashville, they had experienced more windy travel days, so the following morning they waved goodbye as they departed Jacksonville Beach while we remained for a full week waiting for a windspeed in our comfort zone. Karen and Ron on Kara Mia had a guest aboard that you'd know well if you ever traveled with them. Seated regally on the back of the flybridge sat Santa Claus. Karen had rigged a way to lift his arm to wave at passing boats. And of course, our most interesting evening with the crew from Kara Mia was a trip to dinner while in Daytona in a car that was one seat short for the group. Since Karen was petite, she volunteered to make the short jaunt to the restaurant in the hatchback trunk. Thus, it is so true that meeting Loopers and locals along the way is definitely a major highlight of the trip.

We chose to stop along the way to see the sights and experience many places large and small along the Loop, as well as patiently waiting on weather and water conditions. And we made the choice to stay in marinas most evenings with only about a dozen nights at anchor. Though anchorages are blissful we would have missed out on so many fascinating people, places, and experiences if we had not chosen more marinas than anchorages. Actually, it came to be that we primarily stayed in marinas due to our beloved Wally, our eleven-year-old Schnoodle. Try as we might, he did not take to the astroturf pad aboard. Though it was situated outside, Wally felt it was still his home and he had too much dignity to do his business in his home. Of course, you can dinghy over to a spot for the doggie business but we encountered a few obstacles. At times there was nowhere to reach a safe shore such as when in a marshy anchorage. Other times there was a good landing but a bit far, or the wind/current did not bode well as we did not have a

very powerful motor (something we would rethink). Also, arriving late in the day to an anchorage in the fall with sunset pending, we were hesitant to attempt a dinghy ride. We found for all three of us that we enjoyed marinas where we could take a walk, find a local restaurant and even more importantly meet with friends new and old.

I would be remiss if I didn't tell you how our daily routines became like a choreographed dance. We each shared time at the helm but we did specialize in some tasks with Jim doing morning engine checks while I prepared our breakfast for the bridge and filled the thermoses with hot and iced teas. As far as docking, I had trained and practiced but the more one does a task the better one becomes so our decision was made to have Jim be the primary at the helm for docking while I communicated with the marina and handled the lines. An absolute must is "marriage savers", the headsets used to easily communicate without needing to shout from the flybridge to the stern. We quickly became quite in tune as we so smoothly entered each lock and secured quickly to the wall, each with our own roles. I might have to admit there were a few minor issues, but together, we persevered.

At the end of a day of travel, we reveled in what an incredible team we were. And, oh yes, there were some unexpected challenges but those, too, were met with precise action and all had a happy ending. Those trials and tribulations also drew us closer as a couple. It seemed we fell into our roles so naturally. Jim, always the problem solver, was fantastic at troubleshooting and creative solutions. I found my niche in navigation. I did the chart planning for our entire trip and really loved it. I also highlighted the guide books with the important notes about tides, shoals, and other hazards. I had wondered what life might be like



in retirement when I didn't have work accomplishments any longer. Well, most will agree that life on the water is so much better than working, and now I had a whole new set of skills to be proud of mastering.

Each Looper chooses their particular boat, speed of travel, and plans where and when to stop in port. Some prefer to anchor as much as possible, saving money to spend more on restaurants and entertainment ashore, while others might prefer to stay in marinas but cook most meals aboard. There is much to see and do for free in every state we traveled through, as well as museums and other local sights that charge admission. Another choice is side trips by boat or rental car while in a particular area. Everyone sets their budget accordingly. Our favorite picks among the most memorable tourist attractions included the very inexpensive Rice Museum in Georgetown, SC. A few well worth the price of admission were the Kennedy Space Center, St. Augustine Trolley Tour, and the Chicago Museum of Natural History. The Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk is free and not to be missed. We actually enjoyed two full days exploring the exhibits. We took side trips in a rental car to both Nashville and Memphis. The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum was filled with incredible memorabilia. The most emotional museum tour was the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, at the site where Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed. Today, more than ever, it is crucial to understand our past. The most unlikely treasure was our trip to The National Quilt Museum in Paducah, KY. Seriously you have to see these masterpieces to believe they were sewn. Even the most reluctant husband enjoyed these unique pieces of artwork.



I will close with the best advice I can offer you: go out there and make it your own Loop of your dreams. There is no right or wrong way to Loop.



Chapter 24

Dirty Laundry, a fresh spin on laundry day!

By Linda McCormick

Moon Dance IV

39' Mainship

Looper In Progress

So, there are a lot of new things to learn when you start the Loop. Here are a few lessons I learned navigating one of the most basic household chores. That's right, time to re-think how to do laundry.

It begins with what you are wearing. For the most part, I am a natural fiber aficionado. However, my first two laundry days taught me that anything cotton just had to go as it is too bulky, and took forever in the dryer.

So, I quickly converted to synthetic. Spandex in particular—also known by the brand name Lycra—the miracle that put stretch in jeans just when I needed a little growing room. Spandex is also breathable, wicks moisture, and **dries quickly**--all qualities that make it essential for Loopers. Other reasons to choose synthetic: no ironing, lighter, more packable, requires less storage space, and provides justification for a whole new wardrobe!

Microfiber towels are also a boon. The reduction in bulk is fantastic, the drying time is almost zero. I bought ours from TaliTowels, a Canadian company that offers a great color range and the option to personalize. I added our boat name so when I forget them in the laundry some kind soul might return them.

I have washed and dried in a shed with gas dryers and in air-conditioned splendor. While not all laundromats are equal, they are the other “Boaters’ Lounge” where you can swap stories and gain local knowledge. From time immemorial women have been bonding at the village well or on the waterfront. Looping is no different.



And yes, Trent Port Marina has the “nicest” laundromat on the Loop and it is free to boot. But everyone knows this and saves their laundry until they arrive for the Looper briefing in June. A good reconnaissance and surveillance plan is required to insert your boat’s dirty linen into the queue.

Canada

Save your loonies (\$1 coin), toonies (\$2 coin) and quarters for the washers and dryers. The machines generally only take coins and two loads could run to \$8-10.

As a sidebar, if you need Canadian money, ask a Canadian. Most of us will happily exchange Canadian for US currency. Even at the banks posted exchange rate both parties will get a better deal if we do the exchange ourselves.

Once you are safely in your slip, check who is in the harbor. If you are the first Looper burgee, it is probably safe to strip the beds and make a dash to the laundry facilities. More than four burgees, a casual observation on the way to the showers to seek out key positions, obstacles, and routes, is the first order of business.

The laundry room is essentially a corridor on the way to the showers. It has direct access to outside so that you don’t have to haul the laundry too far. But take note, the first pair of machines is not the optimal position unless you have acute hearing and are quick on your feet. Someone coming in from the outside might catch you inadvertently with a doorknob in the back.

And remember Google is your friend. When you have given up on ever getting into the marina laundry and begin to search out an alternative - check with Google.

Once, after a number of small towns with no laundries, I spotted one near the grocery store on our provisioning run. Right here we go. Pack everything up. Hump it along the mooring line, past the blue line, over the bridge, along Mainstreet for three blocks, turn left and a block later: ta-da! The next day when walking the dogs, I found the other laundromat about 200 yards away from the boat with a nice little coffee shop and bookstore beside it.



That brings up the subject of how to get the laundry to a machine. On my very first trip, I channeled all the WWII movies of sailors and their duffle bags boarding a ship. Figuring they must know the best way, I stuffed all the laundry into pillowcases. Hoisting them to my shoulder, I staggered down the dock, leaving a trail of socks and panties behind me. I tried several different methods of transportation and have finally settled on an old rolling suitcase. It is soft-sided, fits below the lower helm, and can take a good-sized load.

In the end, it's your laundry and your Loop so do what works best for you!



Chapter 25

Looping on the “Little Boat”

**By Laurie Sullivan
Laurie Jean**

26’ Cutwater Trawler Gold Looper – 2019

When we started the Great Loop in January 2019, we noticed how big the other Looper boats were! What were we thinking? Ten months on a 26’ Cutwater boat? Will our marriage survive? Will our boat handle some of the challenges that we read about like the Mississippi River, Lake Michigan, and “Eddys” along with the river system?

We quickly discovered that our little 26’ boat, the “Laurie Jean”, had everything we needed. Upon entering the locks on the Trent-Severin Waterway, most seasoned lock masters would say, “Your boat is a perfect size!” Kevin and I agreed, and some of our daily chats were often about how our boat was for us “the perfect size”. Here is a list of the benefits of being one of the “littlest” boats on the Loop:

- We had a shallow draft of 2.6 feet, no issues getting into protected anchorages. Also, we never “bumped” while on the Dismal Swamp ... probably just lucky!
- There was always room for the “Little Boat” in the marinas.



- Great on fuel... entire trip fuel cost was less than \$7,000!
- While in Canada, we could always find a mooring spot on the very busy Trent Severn Waterway by squeezing our little boat between the much larger boats.
- Single engine, less maintenance.

Certainly, we didn't have all the storage and living space of our fellow Loopers. However, we had all the same amenities such as an oven, microwave, stovetop, refrigerator/freezer, two showers, heat, air, and a large comfy bed! We had several rules when packing for the trip:



- Two of everything... wine glasses, coffee mugs, travel cups, etc... We didn't pack as if we were having overnight guests! LOL!
- A clear understanding that the clothing that we brought would be the clothing we would wear seven days a week and then find a laundry facility.
- I became the queen of food storage... take all food out of cardboard boxes and store in a plastic crate, take meats out of styrofoam containers and place in freezer bags and only purchase enough food for two weeks, as a grocery store was always nearby.
- Time alone was at a premium ... Kevin and I loved spending time together but there were times that one of us needed a "timeout". When this happened, we had to respect each other's time, one of us on the stern and one on the bow!!!

Communication between the two of us on the boat didn't require those "marriage savers", the headsets that couples use to scream at each other! We were in a lock on the Erie Canal, all by ourselves and Kevin was trying to push the debris away

from our intake system, when all of a sudden, we were drifting off the wall because he let go of his lock line. I was on the bow, yelling, “Kevin, what are you doing?” and he in return yelled, “Shut the #&\$K up.” When I looked up to the top of the lock wall, there were about 50 tourists that just got off a tour bus, taking videos!! I got the biggest chuckle out of this one!

Buddy boating with the larger boats was something that we will cherish forever! We quickly discovered that it wasn't the size of the boat that mattered, it was the crew on the boats. When rafting up, we had everything on our boat to take part in our group dinners and afternoon swims in the Canadian waters. We were one of the few boats in our gang that even had a floating raft with us!



Having “docktails” was a highlight of our trip. Many times, there would be “meet and greet” activities. We were once asked in a very large group, “What is the most unique thing about being on the Loop?” My response, “We are on one of the smallest boats and still married!” So, I guess our marriage did survive living on a 26' boat for 306 days as we just celebrated our 34th anniversary as Gold Loopers!!!



Chapter 26

Obstacles & Opportunities

By Amy Deutl

Selah Way

36' Albin Trawler

Gold Looper – 2020

Our decision to travel America’s Great Loop came about rather quickly once we began cruising in our 1980 Albin 36’ trawler in the spring of 2018. During this first summer on Lake Champlain, with record high temperatures, beautiful weekend cruises, and lovely, secluded anchorages, it was evident that my husband, David, and I could easily liveaboard for at least a year, and what better way to spend our time doing this than to travel the Great Loop! In the months that followed, however, we would encounter several obstacles - not only in navigating life issues, but also navigating the waterways.

The first obstacle came in the form of the big “C” for me. I was diagnosed with bladder cancer early that fall, underwent major surgery, and began my recovery. At the same time, one of my best friends was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer. Together, we struggled through her chemotherapy treatments and the sad acknowledgment of a life shortened way too soon. Her desire to travel in her final year included meeting David and me on the Loop with her bike and traveling parts of the Erie Canal and Great Lakes when circumstances would allow. It was a tough winter and spring, to say the least, with both of us



coming to grips with our realities and how we would continue to enjoy life at its fullest in the meantime. We both took the attitude that we were going to continue “livin’ the dream” for however long that might mean. Sadly, for Deb, she passed away in mid-June, just days after Selah Way began her Great Loop adventure. A baseball bat was given to Deb as a symbol of her “team” that walked by her side and worked hard to beat the cancer. We mounted that red bat on the front of Selah Way’s flybridge, dedicating our first year of travel to Deb’s memory, a meager substitution for actually having her on board with us instead.

My battle with cancer had a much better outcome as it was caught in the early stages and only required quarterly scans. Then, my scan in April found another tumor and now required removal and quarterly immunotherapy treatments for the next several years. I will admit that I questioned whether or not it was the right time to begin our Loop that June. Everything else was coming into place. I had worked incredibly hard over the last year or more downsizing and preparing our home so that it could be rented or possibly sold.



After building our family home nearly forty years ago, raising our children here, and creating so many memories with friends and family, this was no easy feat, physically or emotionally. One family member’s advice was to put off our trip, get my health in order, and wait to sell our home. But, my love of the water and the thought of the adventure of boat life was too strong to hold me back. With the approval and encouragement of my surgeon, we sold the house, packed up our final bins, and boarded Selah Way bound for the canals, lakes, rivers, and waterways of the Great Loop anyway!

The next obstacle we faced was not only making progress on the Loop but having to make weekly trips back to Vermont for immunotherapy treatments for the next six weeks. We recognized that scans would be necessary at the end of the summer and we would be too far from Vermont to make that happen. The added cost of

rental cars and occasional airline tickets would add an additional burden to our budget. The search for another surgeon in the Michigan area began. In the meantime, David and I were well into Looper life. We both loved playing Huck Finn, maneuvering through locks in the canal, meeting other Loopers, visiting with family along the route, and getting into a routine called boat life. What beauty we experienced each and every day. Being on the water is an extremely peaceful feeling ... most of the time.

We realized our boat was aptly named Selah Way; Selah being a Hebrew word meaning “rest and consider” or “praise”. We did much of both. Surrounded by nature consisting of forests, marshes, beaches, wildlife, fish, and fowl provided peaceful moments filled with wonder and awe. Each day we traveled, David and I began a ritual of a high-five as soon as we got situated in our captain and first mate seats for the day. Thankfully, we managed to find rental cars for the weekly trips back to Vermont for treatments and even found a surgeon in Grand Rapids and made an appointment to have my next scan done there.



We particularly enjoyed the times when we traveled with other Looper boats along the journey. It was never planned but happened by coincidence as we found others headed in the same direction at the same time. A Looper favorite near the end of each day was “docktails” when we could all just kick back with a cold drink of choice and tell tales while relaxing on the dock with other Loopers and boaters at any particular marina. While heading up the shoreline of Lake Huron one hot day in August, we radioed to our friends on “Antonio” that we had decided to stop in the middle of the lake, turn off the engine, and take a dive into the water to cool off. “Great idea,” they agreed as they pulled up near us. Lake Huron’s water is beautifully clear, deep, and also quite chilly, but it didn’t stop us from diving in a few times, providing immediate relief from the heat and a few laughs.

Arriving later that day at Mackinac Island was another highlight of the trip. This is an island accessible only by private boats and ferries. The only transportation allowed, other than walking, is by bike or horse and making it an incredible step back in time to a much slower pace. I can still hear the clomping of horses as they paraded by our boat carrying the myriad of tourists that frequent Mackinac Island.

As we arrived in Lake Michigan and were awed by the sand dunes and sandy beaches along the shoreline, yet another obstacle surfaced and I was facing surgery once again due to another tumor. This certainly was not what we had planned and the thought of having to put our trip on hold crossed my mind. David rolled with the news and plotted out a course that would allow me to undergo surgery, receive six more weekly treatments, and still continue our journey. Would it work? Thankfully, all the plans came into place, and without any side effects or limits on my ability to travel, we began our journey down the rivers from Chicago. In addition, we faced obstacles along the way when the locks closed for maintenance, putting us weeks behind our original plan.



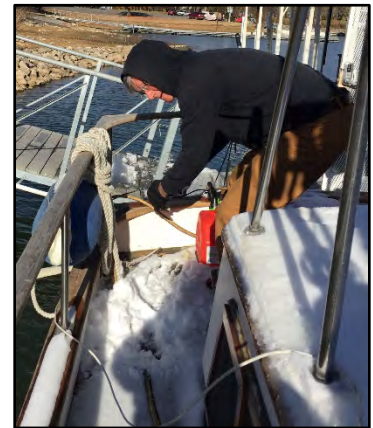
Our adventure down the Illinois, Mississippi, and Ohio Rivers was an experience we will never forget! We luckily traveled with Gold Loopers, Dick and Kathy on Great Escape, during this part of the trip and benefited from their experience as we encountered locks, fast currents, huge tows and barges, debris, and submerged markers (ATONS) along the way. This section of the Loop found both of us constantly watching the river for obstructions and would serve to build our confidence for the next section of the journey further south. We made Green Turtle Bay in southwestern Kentucky our home for the next two months as our friends on Great Escape and Easy Living continued south. This



allowed us to make weekly trips of less than six hours to Chicago for my weekly treatments.

Unfortunately, southwest Kentucky experienced a colder than normal winter and we ended up with snow on the decks and docks along with icicles hanging from the boat! On the other hand, our delay allowed us to enjoy some very talented local artists at Grand Rivers' Badgett Playhouse. We dined at the long-awaited re-opening of Patti's 1880 Settlement and were immersed in the spirit of Christmas with a grandiose display of lights and caroling on several occasions. A visit to the Grand Ole Opry at Nashville for a weekend of country music and more spectacular Christmas displays made our layover pass quickly.

Finally, with my treatments completed, we were more than ready to leave Green Turtle Bay and head south on December 10th. It was cold and windy, but we dressed for the weather and made the best of it. Even Huck Finn would have considered us crazy to run the rivers at this time of the year considering we were even behind legendary Loopers, Ted and Sarah on the Manatee, who are known for traveling the rivers late in the season on their thirty-ninth year of Looping. Nothing I have read regarding the Great Loop prepared me for the challenges and obstacles on the rivers.



Of course, we had record-breaking flood levels as we headed down from Demopolis, Alabama. We waited weeks for the debris and levels to subside to make it barely passable to continue our travels.

What a relief it was to finally arrive safely in Mobile Bay in late January and be greeted by DOLPHINS! The dolphins are such amazing sea creatures and never ceased to amaze us and put a smile on our faces. They amused us nearly every day from Mobile Bay to the New Jersey coast, surfacing, blowing, jumping, and then escorting us at the bow of the boat as we slowly traveled in their waters. We had arrived in the salt waters and sunny, southern temperatures, and, man, we were thrilled! Finally, we could relax and enjoy what we had been chasing - that 80-degree weather.

But our plans were quickly altered when approximately six weeks later, COVID-19 would stop us in our tracks. Well, not exactly. Many Loopers chose to stay put, but we found it would still be safe and possible to continue our travels. We chose to anchor out for the most part and only went ashore for necessities, such as fuel, pump-outs, and provisioning. The Gulf Coast was gorgeous and warm and we found beautiful anchorages along the way, especially at Cayo Costa and Anna Maria Island. The pandemic would thwart our plans to visit the Keys this time around, but we quickly became accustomed to saying “next year” as we passed by the islands of Sanibel and Captiva and so many other places that were part of our original plans.

Realizing that our future would definitely include living aboard our boat for several years to come, I decided to find another excellent surgeon at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida. This would allow us a home away from home (Vermont) that would become our go-to place for medical needs regarding my bladder cancer. If we had decided to postpone our travels on the Great Loop, I never would have found such a great facility and comprehensive care. Thankfully, my scans in January and April were both clear of any tumors and both treatment periods only involved three weeks of travel back and forth from the boat to Vermont. Again, this caused some delays and additional expenses as we moved north. More obstacles for sure, but with some careful planning, watching the weather, and trusting God with the details, the dream of crossing our wake and gaining the status of “Gold Loopers” was within sight!

Social distancing was now the new normal as we continued our journey home towards New York and Vermont. We found this to be an easy transition because when you are living and traveling on a boat, you are naturally isolated from just about everyone. Seldom did we stay at a marina and we became quite proficient at anchoring in wind and currents which are typical conditions in the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. So, you see, even the obstacle of encountering a pandemic along the way turned into an opportunity to learn new things.

David and I discussed and noted several locations that we would be sure to visit the next time we came south when social distancing won't be the norm. This made it easier as we passed by all those lovely towns and beaches along the way. The

inlets and sounds on the Atlantic ICW amazed and challenged us with the beauty and expanses of the big water we encountered. We learned how to gauge the depths, currents, and tides and choose safe anchorages and weather windows to make our journey safe and enjoyable. There are not enough books to read or courses to take to learn all this stuff! Much of my previous boating experience came from the years I spent with my family on Lake Ontario. But, cruising over five thousand miles and dealing with all the mistakes and mishaps became our most important learning opportunities. It's true that experience is the best teacher. Although, by all means, read as much as you can before you venture out!

As we crossed the Delaware Bay into Cape May, New Jersey, I began to realize that our journey was quickly coming to an end when we would soon cross our wake. It was now May 30, 2020, exactly 352 days of experiencing and traveling through canals, locks, rivers, lakes, waterways, and oceans. Our dream was suddenly becoming a reality. There was nothing more moving to allow this reality to sink in as we arrived in New York Harbor a few days later. The expansive Verrazano Narrows Bridge with the backdrop of New York City's skyline was a thrill we had anticipated for months! It did not disappoint. It was quite an emotional moment as we got closer and thought about all those who had also entered this harbor arriving in the new world in centuries past. And then, there she stood - the Statue of Liberty - larger than life.

The pandemic had closed most businesses and attractions in New York City, so there was hardly any water traffic other than a ferry or two. We took in the sights and then ventured behind Liberty Island where we anchored overnight. The next morning, we had front row seats cruising up the Hudson River past Manhattan and enjoyed the beautiful sights along the way. High rises and towering buildings were soon replaced with magnificent green and rocky mountain landscapes that sloped down to the river on either side. Within two days, we were on the home stretch of 140 days of travel, about to cross our wake and make our own history.

The welcoming crew at Donovan's Shady Harbor Marina and representatives of the Awenke Yacht Club made our arrival back at the dock incredibly memorable. What an unbelievable feeling to have completed America's Great Loop. Our celebration lasted nearly three days when we finally received our new burgee and

proudly displayed it showing our status as Gold Loopers! What have I gained over the past twelve months of this adventure? Too much to include in one short story, but I absolutely understand that life is short and so you best live it to the fullest while you can. Grab hold to whatever dreams you have and make them a reality.

I truly believe that attitude has much to do with your overall health, so staying positive and trusting God for the outcome is the best policy. I had very little time to sit and worry about my situation. Our journey on the Great Loop provided exactly what I needed to heal from my diagnosis of cancer, the loss of my dear friend, and the loss of our family home while adapting to a new life on the water. I wouldn't have had it any other way. I am extremely thankful for my children and their spouses for being supportive of our crazy lifestyle. I owe a great debt of gratitude to my loving husband who is one amazing captain and fixer of all things nautical. We will celebrate our 40th anniversary this month. What more could I ask for? Maybe a few less obstacles and a few more opportunities.

Join our Facebook page, Selah Way, for updates on our Loop experience or find our map at www.trackmytour.com (Selah Way)



Chapter 27

Undeclared

By Susan Pellett

SuzyQ aboard Allons-y!

40' Silverton AC

Gold Looper – 2019

My love of boating and river life began at birth on the Ohio River. Through the years, my family traveled the Ohio River and all of its tributaries. I was a sea explorer scout and our post specialized in sailing. I knew someday I wanted to travel via the blue highways, always looking for waterways that connected. As a young mother who was abused by my spouse, I moved to the Tampa Bay area of Florida. With my sons in tow, we paddled almost all of Florida's springs and rivers.

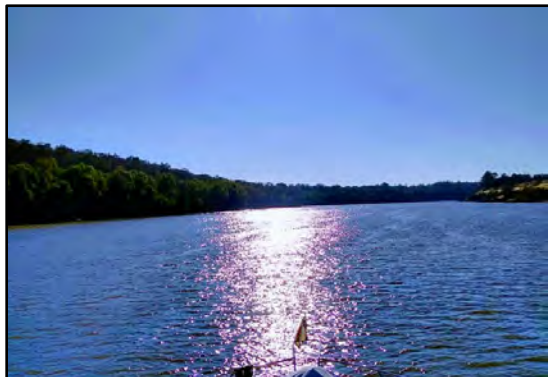
In 2000, I began searching for a place to live on a waterway where I could travel from Tampa, where I had raised my blended family of six boys, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where my family and lifelong scouting friends remained. I found that place on Kentucky Lake on the Tennessee River.

I took an early retirement from the school system in Florida. I owned and operated an independent hardware store for 10 years in Tennessee while dreaming and researching the Great Loop. I printed the Great Loop map from the web site, framed it, and kept it on my piano, keeping the dream alive.



Having extreme scoliosis and being fused from brain stem to tailbone by 40 years old, my ability to move around was declining. I had two heart attacks before turning 50. I knew I had to find a way to do the Loop. My spouse of 25 years decided he didn't want to be married anymore, so I came back to Florida and sought out a small boat I could transform into a little Looper boat to single hand.

SuzyQ was a 1985 sport craft 210 Fisherman. I took a U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary safe boating class in preparation for my journey. The boat came with a basic marine radio and chart plotter. I added a windless and inverter and a house bank of batteries. I replaced the fuel tank with a larger one to meet range requirements. I also installed a larger freshwater tank. After three years of rebuilding and sea trials and getting on disability, I set out with the class of 2017, single-handing my SuzyQ. I cruised for 42 days from Tampa Bay and up the ICW to Great Bridge, Virginia. I did my own oil changes, fixed things that broke, met lots of great people who couldn't believe I was single-handing the Loop on a 21-foot cuddy cabin.



That leg of the Loop ended with my boat, my little SuzyQ, being crushed between a barge and the face dock at mm12 on the ICW. My son and boyfriend brought my boat trailer up from Florida to retrieve the boat and all my gear from the crane it was hanging on. I didn't wait for my insurance to get to me. The towboat company paid me what I had into that boat and I found a replacement to transfer all my gear onto. "SuzyQ Too" is a 27-foot Celebrity. She needed a lot more work than expected and still, to this day, is a work in progress.

While keeping the dream alive with daily reading of the AGLCA forum, I picked up on a thread about another planner who bought a veteran Loop boat to liveboard and single hand the Loop after his wife had passed away. His post stated that after moving the boat from North Carolina to Louisiana, that the Loop might not be so fun alone. I reached out to him. We decided to meet and be co-captains of his 40-foot Silverton.



I flew out to Louisiana in January of 2019 to see if I was physically able to get around on the boat. We came up with a written agreement on how to share expenses. It worked out quite nicely. The Silverton was a floating condo compared to SuzyQ. We completed the Loop in nine months, continuously moving. We were very frugal, only staying at marinas when we needed more than three services.

To maintain my ability to walk, I do aqua therapy several times a week. We sought out pools for my therapy and sometimes beaches. I used my bike to get from the boat to places onshore. Once or twice we walked to a place that was farther than expected and my co-captain had to go back to the boat and get my bike. Marina stays were for use of the pool, laundry, pump out, and groceries. We shopped for the best fuel prices and traveled at 7 knots most of the time.

I had the time of my life. I saw some incredibly beautiful places. We met some of the nicest people on earth, some of whom will remain lifelong friends.

In conclusion, I would like to say, "Where there is a will, there's a way." Never give up on your dream! I will continue to be a part of the AGLCA and share my knowledge with anyone who will listen.





Chapter 28

Illinois Waterway Adventure

By Brenda Howrey

B-Side

34' PDQ Power Catamaran

Gold Looper – 2020

The fall of 2019 held some challenges for Looper boats. The 336-mile Illinois Waterway, which connects the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River near St Louis, has eight locks. In 2019 they began a three-year plan to repair the 80 to 90-year-old river locks. Two of the locks, Starved Rock and Marseilles, would be fully closed on September 20 for two weeks.

We had to make a decision while on our Loop, would we leave Lake Michigan before or after the lock closure? Before - meant cutting short our time on Lake Michigan. After - takes you into the riskier, colder and windier weather of October. There also was the possibility that the locks would stay closed longer, there was no guarantee they would reopen on time. Bruce and I had gone back and forth on this decision our whole trip along Michigan's west coast. We had lived in Michigan for 18 years and were enjoying seeing all of the shore towns from a different perspective on our PDQ 34 Power Catamaran named B Side. We still had plans to see some friends and visit our previous hometown of Battle Creek.

Unfortunately, the weather was not cooperating and we were facing fewer and fewer good weather days. We would need a good weather day to do the crossing to Chicago and if we delayed much longer, we might not get a good day and would have to cross when the winds and waves were not in our favor. We were in

Saugatuck, MI when we made the decision. We would end our Lake Michigan adventure early, change our itinerary, and cross to Hammond, Indiana. The next day would be a good travel day and we knew that some of our Looper friends were already in Hammond, and we could meet up with them and travel down the Illinois Riverway together. Other than some dense fog and large rollers, we had an uneventful crossing and arrived in Hammond. The next day we spent a wonderful day touring the city of Chicago. Definitely take the architectural boat tour in Chicago if you ever have the chance.

The sun was just rising in the east, providing beautiful red and orange hues, when we headed out of the Hammond Marina at 6:30 am on September 14. The moon was putting on its own spectacular show as it was setting in the west. Southern Cross (Ocean Alexander 61 Pilothouse) took point, we were next, and Chasing Eighty (Meridian 459) took up the rear position. We could see another Looper boat taking the shallower inside track to the entrance to the Calumet River. We hoped we would arrive at the entrance to the river before they did. The Chicago skyline looked beautiful on the horizon with the rose sky backdrop. We cruised onto the Calumet River as a train of four boats.

About eight miles down the river, three other boats, About Time (Meridian 405), SeaBatical (Ocean Alexander 511), and Golden Daze (Fleming 55), were delaying their departure so they could join us on our journey to the Joliet wall, our stop for the night. Hopefully, we would make our meeting time of 8:30 am and not be held up by the lock or bridges. The Calumet River is very industrial with several



railroad bridges that, depending on the height of the river, may be too low to pass under without asking for a lift. Some of the Looper boats that preceded us had had one to two hour waits for the railroad bridges that needed to be raised- it all depended on the train schedules. A two-hour delay was not in our schedule! At the first bridge we

came to, Southern Cross nosed up to it and we looked from behind to determine if they had clearance. They were clear! The tallest height of the four boats was 18'6". Fortunately, our only bridge delay was just 20 minutes for one railroad bridge and we made it through O'Brien Lock without any problem. The other hazard on the Calumet River is the tows and barges. They are the bigger vessels, so you get out of the way! The river is not very wide so sometimes you would have to find a spot to wait out the passing of the tow. Depending on their size and draft, they can create dangerous wakes and currents from the wash of their engines. You radio them to find out which side they want you to pass on, one whistle or two whistles in the direction is given, obviously terminology from before VHF radio!

As we passed Marine Services, the other boats joined our line. Now seven Looper boats continued down the river. We saw on NEBO (an app that allows you to track boats) that we would be joining several other Looper boats that were headed down another canal, the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, which originates in downtown Chicago. Due to the current height of Lake Michigan water, your boat's air draft needed to be around 16-feet to fit under the downtown canal bridges. NEBO is not always accurate, but we knew at least three boats would be just ahead of us as the Calumet River joined the Sanitary Canal. We saw the three boats cruising by at the junction in the distance and we followed behind them, so now our flotilla had grown from seven to ten boats - all cruising at 8 knots in a line. Due to the manmade sides of the canal, our wakes (even cruising fairly slow) would bounce off the walls creating a washing machine effect that made our cruise a little uncomfortable -- very bouncy.

We were such a large group now (two more boats had joined the tail end, 12 boats now). The workers on the barges that were sitting tied up on the side of the canal became irritated due to the rocky water. They were making hand gestures and yelling at us. The next lock we came to was Lockport Powerhouse. The lock had some barges in it so the lockmaster said it would be 20 min or so. When locking, the "or so" can turn into hours! As we waited, we started to organize the boats. Everyone was using channel 68 so that we could communicate. We put the large

boats in the front and then stair-stepped down. We knew we would have to raft off one another in the lock to be able to fit all 12 boats. The larger boats would be against the lock wall and we would have two or three boats rafted onto the larger boats. As we continued to wait in the hot sun, Bruce had 80s music jamming and I started dancing on the gangway. Tiki Queen (37' CHB Trawler) joined in with the dance moves!

Finally, the lockmaster gave us the go-ahead. Considering how worn out and tired everyone was from the very long and very hot day, we moved into the lock smoothly and with a lot of cooperation. This was our first experience in one of the larger locks of the rivers. They are actually pretty easy to negotiate if you are against the lock wall since you just Loop your line onto a single floating bollard. Rafting other boats is the tricky part, making sure you have enough fenders out and that they are at the right height for the uneven side of the other boat (drone picture credit: Rick Brunner).



After the lock, we came to our destination for the evening, the Joliet wall. It is a free wall with a few power pedestals available and an urban park-like area around it. There were already a few boats on the wall- we fit our twelve boats by rafting a few of the boats. We were hanging out waiting to find a spot when we heard a holler from one of the boats. It was Pegasus (Grand Banks 36). They had a spot on the wall next to a power pedestal. They had us raft off them and we were able to bring our power cord across their boat and connect to power – ahhhhh, blessed air conditioning!



As the evening continued, more boats arrived until there were 26 boats on the wall and rafting. Pretty amazing! Unfortunately, there are not a lot of options for Looper boats in the area other than the Joliet Wall. We all started congregating along the sidewalk for Docktails to share stories about the day and ended up celebrating our stressful day with a “dance party” on the back of Southern Cross’s boat and on the sidewalk. Twenty or so Loopers showing off our dance moves to all sorts of music styles. Laughter and joy are a great way to end a stressful day.



The next morning, as the rain thundered down on our boat, we huddled around the radio listening to the 6:30 am Looper conference radio call on channel 71. Greg from Golden Daze had called the three locks that we would need to travel through



that day. The lockmasters said there were a lot of barges scheduled and that it would be difficult to get the boats through the locks that day. They recommended waiting to move until the next day. Everyone was in agreement to stay on the Joliet wall for another day.

Unfortunately, when several of the boats had docked on the wall the day before they had docked with their stern facing upstream, with the heavy rain came a lot of debris. The guys ended up working on removing the debris that was getting caught by the boats. Logs, grasses, and other items were getting snagged in the boats. At one point, it looked like Jamie from About Time was harvesting a crop - he was using a boat hook to throw mounds of long grasses onto the wall. Once the boats were free of the debris, they turned the boats around so that they were all facing upstream.

The next morning, September 16, we had another 6:30 am radio conference call. All 28 boats (a few more boats arrived the previous day) would head to the first lock, Brandon Road Lock. The lockmaster thought we would all fit. There were a few close calls as the rafted boats motored away and the other boats left the wall. B-Side and a few other boats temporarily tied to the opposite bank because we thought a barge was coming. However, there was no barge and we were soon all underway. Before the first lock there were several bridges, one of them had to be opened for all 28 boats to go under. I am sure the cars waiting on that bridge wondered about the long wait.

We arrived at the Brandon Road Lock and after a short wait we were able to load . Once again, the large boats went on the walls and the smaller boats rafted onto them two or three boats deep. Two more boats arrived while we were waiting, so there were 30 boats that locked through at one time- a record for that lock! Greg (Golden Daze) and Dave (Southern Cross) did an amazing job coordinating that many boats to work together.

The Dresden Island Lock was next on our journey. We had to wait for a barge to lock through, so several boats dropped anchors to make it easier to wait and other boats rafted onto them. Not all of the boats would be able to fit into this lock, so we would be splitting the group in half. This lockmaster had a particular way he wanted the boats called in. He first called for three 35-foot or shorter boats- we quickly said over the radio that B-Side (34-feet) would go! Two other boats rafted onto us inside the lock. We made it through and the 13 boats continued down the Illinois River on our own.

The final lock of the day was the Marseilles Lock. This was one of the locks that would be closing on the 20th. South of the lock is a marina called Heritage Harbor- near Ottawa, IL. This was our destination. After about an hour of barge delay, we made it through the last lock and arrived at Heritage Harbor at



6:30 pm. It had been a long day and it was a relief to be through one of the locks that would be closing on the 20th.

The boats that did not make it through the Dresden Island Lock with us arrived at Heritage Harbor at 9 pm, the night was inky black. We waited anxiously on the docks. The marina had a skiff out on the water with a spotlight trying to assist the boats as they navigated into the marina. Many of the Loopers had never captained their boats at night. It was scary watching the boats creep toward what they thought might be their dock slip and then having to navigate away from it and go somewhere else. We heard later that not knowing how to turn their navigation screens to night mode was an issue for many, their bright screens blinded them. With relief we helped the final boat dock. It was the end to a long two days on the Illinois Waterway. The marina kept their restaurant open late and delayed their briefing on the Illinois River until everyone had arrived. The marina did a great job!

On Sept 17 a group of five boats decided to stay one more day at Heritage Harbor. It would give us some separation from the large “flotilla”, allow us to relax, and as a bonus, the marina had three courtesy cars we could use. Several of us went into town to use the laundromat and make a quick grocery stop. That evening we piled into their large shuttle van and had dinner in Ottawa.



Early on the 18th, Southern Cross, About Time, SeaBatical, Golden Daze, and B-Side headed out to continue our journey on the Illinois River. Starved Rock Lock was our first challenge of the day. This was the second lock that would close on the 20th. The lock overlooks a beautiful state park area. While waiting for the lock to open we watched the white pelicans flying and swimming about. When we were through that lock it was

such a relief- we had made it through the locks before they closed. The journey to Lower Henry anchorage was joyous. The wildlife helped us celebrate. We thoroughly enjoyed watching the eagles and white pelicans that welcomed us on

the river. We rafted all five of boats together at the anchorage. The two outside boats and the middle boat all dropped anchors. About Time and B-Side just rafted. We had a girls' afternoon on Golden Daze and the boys hung out on the front of B-Side and figured out how Dave's drone worked. That evening, we enjoyed a meal together and toasted with champagne our success in making it through the locks on time. Such a beautiful anchorage.

The five boats continued our Illinois River journey the next day. Whoever was the point boat would call out on the radio any logs and debris floating in the river to let the following boats know to keep their eyes open. We passed Peoria, which does have a dock we could use, but that was only about 30 miles into our day and we wanted to get further down the river. It would have been fun to go through the Caterpillar museum. Unfortunately, we would have to enjoy that tour another time. The Peoria Lock is just beyond Peoria. It is a wicket dam so sometimes, if the wickets are down, you can bypass the lock. A wicket dam has movable gates that can be raised or lowered depending on the depth of the river. We called and the wickets were down, so we cruised right by the lock. It was a little disconcerting, although a pleasure since it meant one less lock we had to lock through!

We stopped, after about a 70-mile trip, behind Quiver Island. It is near the city of Havana, IL. We again anchored all five boats together - we did it very quickly this time! When we looked in the dinghy that Southern Cross was towing, we saw that an Asian Carp had been caught by the dinghy during our trip. It is crazy to see those fish jump



out of the water and occasionally slam into your boat. The city of Havana had a small dock/boat launch in a park. We used that to dock the dinghy when we brought the dogs to shore and later Bruce and I, and Trish and Jamie (About Time), went to shore and walked around Havana. Jamie picked up a great looking Havana Ducks high school sweatshirt. It was already getting cold in the evenings. Havana was reconstructing their Main Street. Dates on the buildings and their grand look

showed that the city had been bustling during the late 1800s. So many river cities have become a shadow of their former selves.

It was still, cool, and crisp the next morning. The nearby power station was surprisingly beautiful in the early morning sun with the steam billowing in a giant cloud above it. The peaceful morning did not forebode the events of the evening. We only had one more lock on the Illinois River, the LaGrange lock. It also is a wicket dam and could potentially be down allowing us to bypass the lock. Before leaving the anchorage, we called the LaGrange Lock. Their wickets were not down and unfortunately, they also had some unscheduled maintenance going on at the lock until 1 pm. We adjusted our travel speed to arrive a little before 1 pm. We arrived a little past noon and again talked to the lockmaster. The work would be done at one, but then he would need to lock through the crane that was assisting in the repairs. We ended up anchoring and rafting while we waited. Dave took the dogs in the dinghy to a boat ramp near the lock. We rafted onto About Time. Jamie fired up his grill and we grilled sausages for lunch. The maintenance and locking of the crane took longer than expected. It was 2:30 pm before we could lock through.

Our plan was to anchor at Buckhorn Island. We arrived and Bruce and I took B-Side up behind the island to see if it would work as an anchorage- our boat only drafts 2.5 feet so we can go in shallow water. We had, at the previous anchorages, been checking out the unfamiliar water for our deeper draft companions. We slowly cruised into the anchorage and noticed the water dropped from 8 feet to 1.5 feet below our keel rather quickly. This anchorage was not going to work. It was now late afternoon and we were getting concerned we would not find an anchorage before dark. There was another island that might work called Willow Island. However, that was another 15 miles.

Bruce and I can go 14-16 knots and so we went out ahead of the other boats so that we could arrive at the anchorage a little early and check out the depth of the water. We were concerned about going faster because of the debris in the water. However, even at the increased speed, we could see the debris in time to change course. The other boats also picked up their speed, just not as much. We arrived at

the anchorage as dusk was arriving and started slowly doing a grid pattern over the water to check for depths. The anchorage was not as wide as the previous two nights' anchorages. Although there was plenty of depth, we would not be able to raft five boats together. As we continued to survey the water depths, the other boats arrived. The wind was beginning to pick up. Unfortunately, the island we were behind was not protecting us from the wind. The current was heading south but the wind was pushing us north and it seemed to be winning the tug-of-war. Everyone agreed about not rafting and so we set up to anchor in a line going south. Southern Cross was the northernmost boat and About Time was the southernmost. We were just north of About Time. We put our anchor down and we could tell it did not set. We pulled it up again and re-launched the anchor. This time, we thought it set but then we noticed we were getting closer and closer to About Time. Unfortunately, our anchor was dragging. We pulled it up again, but now it was getting dark and the wind was even stronger.

Rick (SeaBatical) called Bruce on the radio and offered to let us raft off of them. As the darkness closed around us, we finished tying up to SeaBatical. Lesson learned, make sure your anchor is robust enough to handle the currents of the rivers! The day had been a long one. While we were rafting off of SeaBatical, we saw Dave go by in the Dinghy with his dog, Ariel. He stopped at Golden Daze and picked up their younger dog, Rusty. He took both dogs to the shore, dropped Rusty



off at Golden Daze, and then we saw him speed past us back to his boat- he had not picked up Golden Daze's older dog or Rick's dog Wyatt. We were not sure what was happening and we could not see his boat in the pitch black. We suddenly received a group text that they were in trouble. Their anchor was dragging so they pulled up the anchor to reset it and they found a tire was wedged onto the anchor. While they were in the process of getting the wayward tire off of their anchor, their boat was carried by the current in the pitch black down toward the northernmost

point of the island. Their keel ended up getting stuck in some mud. Bruce and Rick got Rick's dinghy down and went to see if they could help (they took spotlights). We soon saw Greg and Jamie come by in Greg's dinghy. Greg's dinghy has a depth finder so they were able to go all around the boat and see that Southern Cross had water depth on all sides- just the keel was stuck. They called BoatUS about a tow and found out they were 50 miles away and could not come until the next afternoon.

The plan was to wait until morning, then SeaBatical would try to tow Southern Cross off the shoal that held it in its grip. I do not think Penny or Dave slept much that night. In the morning we disconnected from SeaBatical and took up a post to watch AIS for possible tows coming down the river. SeaBatical came up and connected lines with Southern Cross. Greg and Jamie watched from Greg's dinghy as extra eyes. SeaBatical started to pull, at first Southern Cross moved, and then it seemed like SeaBatical would not be powerful enough. Southern Cross was stuck. Then ... the boat moved again, and with a jerk, it was free of the shoal! Southern Cross went in circles a few times to make sure their propellers were clear and then Dave took the boat up to 20 knots or so to clean out the engines. There did not seem to be any mechanical issues.

We continued our journey and arrived at Grafton, IL later that day. Dave and Penny treated us to a fabulous dinner at the marina restaurant to celebrate our "team's" success! Grafton, Illinois is right near the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. The marina has huge pilings (approx. 50 ft) that form the floating dock system. All of the docks float, the office and restaurant float, even the pool will float. So as the Mississippi and Illinois rivers rise and fall, depending on the flood stage, the marina continues to function. It is amazing to see how high up on the pilings you can see a water line. A few days after we arrived, About Time and Southern Cross headed out and continued their journey. Our boat, SeaBatical, and Golden Daze stayed in Grafton a week and a half. The three of us would head down the Mississippi together.



Chapter 29

The Gulf of Mexico is FLAT

By Robin McVey

The Lower Place

42' Jefferson Sundeck Platinum Looper – 2020

After we completed our first Loop in October 2017, The Lower Place was hauled out at Aqua Yacht Marina in Iuka, MS, for some TLC. Autumn turned to winter and winter turned COLD! Our boat was splashed again in early February 2018 and on Sunday, February 11, 2018, we departed Aqua Yacht Marina at 7:15 a.m. headed south... it was 40°! We had no real destination except warmer weather with a realistic expectation to be home by June for summer fun on Pickwick Lake. So, we took advantage of the “high water opportunity” on the Tenn-Tom Waterway and found ourselves on the Florida Panhandle about two weeks later. Below is an excerpt from our travel journal dated March 6, 2018.

This boat life seems to be anything but leisure sometimes... but I'm not complaining!! At the time of our last update on March 3rd, we were anchored at Parkers Bayou on the panhandle of Florida. We were starting our research in earnest for a possible weather window to cross the Gulf of Mexico. Several of our trusted sites (confirmed by several of our trusted humans) seemed to indicate favorable conditions on Monday, March 5, 2018, for an overnight crossing on the Gulf of Mexico. We decided it would be worth the added miles/hours to push toward Carrabelle, FL – 87 miles AND we changed time zones (central to eastern). We arrived at C Quarters Marina on Sunday, March 4th at 5:05 p.m. capping an 11-hour travel day!



We topped off with fuel, tied up in our slip and I put my feet on solid ground for the first time in three days. Soon we saw Gary and Coleen from Calypso Poet; they wanted to meet for dinner. The Fisherman's Wife was an excellent choice and we closed the place down!! (they close at 8:00 p.m.)

During dinner it was decided we would embark on the highly anticipated Gulf Crossing on Monday the 5th – all research and valued opinions seemed to indicate if we didn't do it Monday, it might take another week or longer to have the right weather. Here we go!!

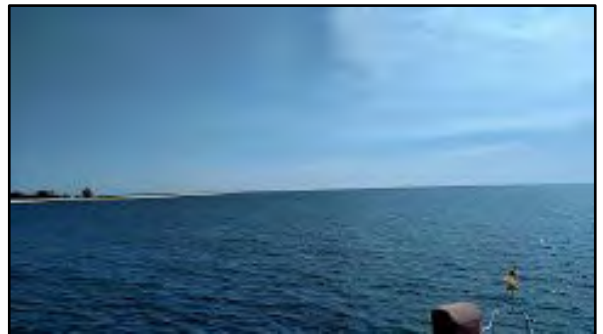
Monday morning (7:00 a.m.) brought a list of easy errands for me! As I was leaving the boat, I met Kenny & Sherry from Blue Moon! They just started their Loop in Pensacola, FL, and we talked with them via VHF radio a few days earlier. They wanted to do the crossing with us! YAY – three boats going together – I was happy!

By 2:00 p.m. we slipped the lines off the dock and headed towards East Pass arriving at 2:40.



We expected “rolling” or “lumpy” (depending on the professional description) seas in the beginning.

Apparently, the first seven hours are “the beginning”. Up the wave, down the wave; or up the wave, fall off the back of the wave; or just plow right through the wave and duck before the salt spray gets you!! It wasn't beyond our comfort zone or our boat's ability – just annoying because I kept spilling my snacks and failing to catch flying coffee mugs!



Sunset came and according to others “the water really laid down” ... hmmm – where’s my peppermint oil? At 8:30 p.m., I went below deck for a nap. Napping



is quite different while underway; I wash my face, brush my teeth and lay in bed completely ready to stand at attention if necessary!! It’s amazing how well one can sleep wearing a complete outfit, shoes and a life jacket! Hey, it was a nap!! By 11:30 p.m. I was back on the flybridge and the water was FLAT, no

wind, no clouds and the almost full moon was breath-taking...spiritual. I was in awe!

Charlie shared that we met two boats earlier (Bucket List & San Soucy) crossing from east to west. Then suddenly we saw Nearly Perfect on the RADAR headed toward Carrabelle too. It was nice to know we weren’t the only folks out there. Soon, Charlie went below deck for his break and I had the BEST time!



I turned on the satellite radio (nothing else had a signal) to The Message and simply had church right there in the moonlight 90 miles offshore on the Gulf of Mexico. As I was listening to Chris Tomlin sing *Indescribable*, I felt like that song was written for the very moment I was living. We take so much for granted in this world and this universe is truly indescribable. I don’t have the words (or space) to share everything I thought, saw or felt on that flybridge – but if you have ever felt you could reach out and touch the stars you know what I’m saying!! God is so very good even when oftentimes I feel unworthy.

By 4:00 a.m. Charlie joined me back on the bridge, the Coast Guard was keeping everyone on alert regarding a red flare sighting and capsized small vessel (60 miles north of us). The moon was stepping aside as we were preparing for dawn! A new

day with good water! By 6:30 a.m. we were happy to see daylight and looking forward to seeing land in a couple of hours!

Calypso Poet and Blue Moon were headed to Tarpon Springs and we were headed to Dunedin, FL (south of Tarpon Springs). Shortly after sunrise we said our thanks and good-byes, adjusted course and continued south staying in the Gulf. When we reached Hurricane Pass (the inlet to Marker 1 Marina), it was low tide and there was not enough water for us to attempt going in. We adjusted course, headed further south toward Clearwater, FL, then channeled over to the ICW and turned NORTH toward Dunedin! There's nothing like a 12-mile detour at the end of the journey. In hindsight, we should have stayed with our group and turned on the ICW at Tarpon Springs... oh well!! After 22 ½ HOURS and 186 MILES we were in Dunedin, FL tied safely to the dock.

I don't know how long we will be here. I just know that since the Gulf crossing is over, we can now start taking our time to figure out what we are going to do! Of course, we need a little nap first!

Thank you for coming along with us on this adventure! We are so blessed to have opportunities in this life to share good news and good times with so many people ... sometimes in the most unexpected places, we are reminded of the only Good News that matters. God loves us. *You placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name. You are an amazing God.*



**As a postscript: not every Gulf crossing is this wonderful ... but it can be!! Know your boat, know your tolerance, know how to read the weather information, and make your own decision. Patience should be the #1 criteria in your decision-making process. I would rather cross a flat Gulf alone than be miserable, mad and sick with a group of other boaters. Ask me how I know??

Enjoy the journey not just the destination.



Chapter 30
Side Trip Sampler – Ohio & the
Black Warrior Rivers
By Barbara Headley Malden
RioMarLago
29' Bayliner Command Bridge
Gold Looper – 2017

Side trips are dead-ends that require backtracking and getting off the Loop. It might feel counterproductive to take a side trip since the whole purpose of “doing the Loop” is well, to DO it! My advice: Don’t fall into that mindset. There’s a reason “it’s not a race” is one of the key mantras. It *IS* the journey...although collecting a few add-on destinations is well worth getting off the ‘official path’. Here, I share overviews of two great side trips we took as part of our 14-month Loop.

Ohio River

The funny thing is, we didn’t know we were ‘doin’ the Loop’, let alone know to label what we were doing as a side trip when we splashed the boat into the Allegheny River just north of Pittsburgh and, a few miles later, joined the Ohio River. In fact, this, our unwitting first side trip, was a prequel to the Loop. It carried us through and past six states: Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois.

We started with the simple plan to move our new-to-us 288 Command Bridge Bayliner westward for cheaper shipping home to the Pacific Northwest. We spent about a day outfitting the boat... after all, we were just going to be on it for a week or so... right? Note: you do not *need* to prep for months or years. Take the leap!

At that time, we hadn't even fully mastered the craft of Amazon Prime next-day-delivery but somehow, we managed to make due. Full credit to all the random, friendly strangers on the River who went out of their way for us. Their kindness and generosity made our first few weeks turn into a journey of a lifetime. Everything from gifts of 100' of line for the big locks (we were clueless!) to Nylabones for our pup to a bag full of September vine-ripened tomatoes and mason-jarred peach moonshine (seriously...you can't make that last one up). Perhaps it was that tone of friendliness that set us on our way, and that was to follow everywhere we went for the next 14 months.



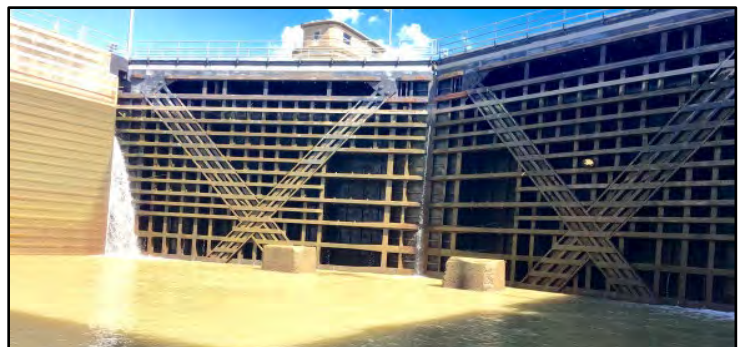
Those first days were filled with, well...firsts! We pumped up our dinghy, test drove, and figured out how to mount it on the swim step, mounted the grill, pumped out the holding tank, added jerry cans to the bow for extra gas, and picked up extra fenders (albeit mismatched) and a cooler to crowd the cockpit. Within a week, we had accidentally started to look like a Looper boat....we just didn't fully realize that was the direction our hearts were taking us.

So, in addition to it being our maiden voyage on RioMarLago, it was also the first time for us to boat on a river, lock, and deal with big, laden-with-coal barges in narrow waterways.

The Ohio has BIG locks with BIG drops. A bit overwhelming at 40 feet!

Fun Fact:

One million gallons of water per minute drain out of this lock!



Then there was our first scary, potentially life-threatening (certainly boat damage-



threatening) event at a lock when I utterly failed at tending the line, and the floating bollard simultaneously and inconveniently decided to fail to do its job (i.e. float) which left us hung up and slowly tilting sideways as the water dropped out from underneath us. A chain reaction ensued: I

shrieked, Nick jumped into action, flew down from the flybridge, and sliced our beautiful 100-foot line with his Swiss army knife.

But despite that misstep, we got “back in the saddle/helm” because we knew The River called to us.



I’ll leave you to google the typical tourist sites for cities, baseball museums, horse races, whiskey tastings, sports events, and the like; but instead will share a few of the off-the-beaten-path discoveries and a feel for boating on the Ohio River. Our overnighting became easier once we stumbled upon *The Ohio River Guidebook* by Jerry Hay. With that in hand, we found some small

docks like these and a few marinas along the way, as well as info on fueling, re-provisioning, and tourist sites. Much later in the Loop, we discovered Active Captain!

And things got even easier once Captain Nick realized he could golf too... just a few steps up



the ramp and he was on the course leaving Ziggy dog and me to some great state park trail walks!

We luckily happened upon the Stern-wheel Festival in Marietta, Ohio—a fun college town. Highlighted by one of the many sunsets and sunrises we enjoyed down the river.

Side trip off the side trip: For a mere extra 100+ miles up the Muskingum River that joins the Ohio River at Marietta, you can explore the U.S. version of a locking system that still uses old hand-turned locks similar to those on the Rideau Canal in Canada.



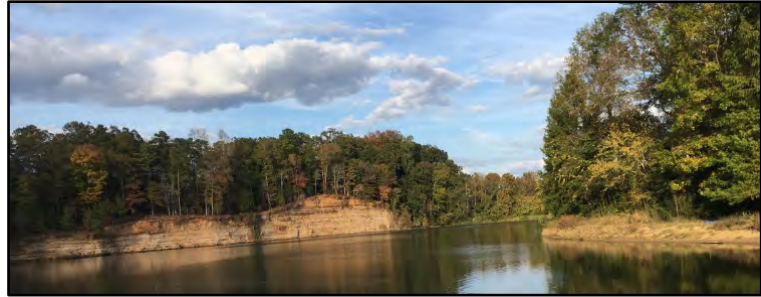
You can boat up for Take-Away - even a McD's! And in a pinch perhaps stay overnight too?

Our trip down the Ohio River Valley countryside was capped off for us Pacific Northwesterners when we were taken under the wing of the friendly gang at the Red

Neck Yacht Club. And they had homebrewed moonshine. And it was unbelievably great!

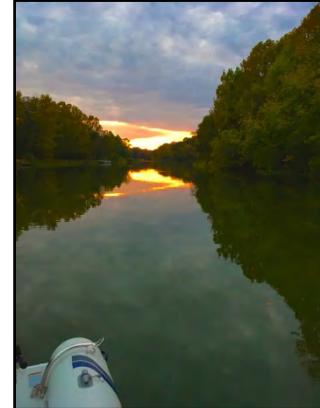


Not sure if it was the moonshine or the sunset or just the splash of water under the hull, but whatever it was, we decided to go ‘at least as far as St. Louis or maybe farther depending on the if-it-stays-fun-gauge’. Well, you know the rest of the story - we stayed on for 14 months of fun., even after that lock scare, which, by the way, was actually our 13th lock to transit. Not that I’m terribly superstitious but you do wonder a little. So, I learned my lesson and have not yet failed to tend my lines but also watch for those thirteens! Lots more lessons along the way but definitely: enjoy the journey, don’t ignore the paths less traveled and live in the moment! My biggest regret of the Ohio Leg is skipping the jaunt up Muskingum River and maybe even UP the Allegheny at the very beginning. Perhaps we’ll see you up there someday?



Black Warrior River

It’s not often we have a chance to visit one of our former foreign exchange students. But we seized the opportunity, backtracked half a mile or so from Demopolis, and went up the Black Warrior River all the way to Birmingham (well, technically not all the way by boat as you will see). After re-provisioning and enjoying Demopolis for a couple of days we headed upriver to explore. We were accompanied by Joan and Don on Panacea--our twin sister boat. Other than the target of Birmingham, we were simply flowing, enjoying, and exploring. Easy to do on that quiet river.



A cut, off of the main river, made for a great anchorage away from the nighttime



barge traffic. A nice homeowner offered his shower and kitchen to us (we didn't take him up on it though!). About a block away by dinghy or along the quiet road was a state park with a small boat ramp, empty campground, and bathrooms. We stayed at this nice anchorage on the way back down too.

It's a scenic river with very little water traffic. A few locals fishing, a few barges, and zero Loopers. And I mean ZERO! No one along the way had ever heard of the Loop nor seen a Looper... not the lockmasters nor at the one "marina" we stayed in.

Speaking of lockmasters: Our nature-filled peace was frequently interrupted during the up and return routes as Captain Nick and the lock crew bantered and chided with a lot of good-natured football trash talk (prime time for the impending game between our own University of Washington Huskies and their Alabama Crimson Tide).



It's a real getaway into the backcountry until you pass by the University of Alabama and Tuscaloosa.

We did stop briefly to tour the architecture of the University. (Don is an architect so we got 'schooled'!) Public docks along the river were sporadic and we had no guidebook ...so we just winged it. This is it! The 100,000+ capacity home of the Crimson Tide.

Technically the Black Warrior River doesn't go all the way to Birmingham (well maybe a trickle of a stream does) but we were lucky to find something somewhat close: little Hideaway Marina that was mostly filled with pontoon boat liveboards/weekenders and recreational fishing boats. We spent a night here and were treated like strange royalty, gifted baseball caps, and invited aboard to watch "the Crimson game" and, of course, share libations. We took a nice walk up the hill for a birds-eye view of our moorage, which was on the "outside" so we did get a few rocking waves from barge traffic. Across the water is the inlet to the anchorage we later took.

We used the ever-handy Enterprise rental car pick up system to get into downtown Birmingham.

We took in lots of intense history at the well-conceived Civil Rights Institute and gathered those thoughts by this beautiful statue in front of the 16th Street Baptist church where the four little girls died after a KKK bombing.



After that emotional time in Birmingham, we left the quaint marina, hoping to recharge in serenity, so we hopped a short distance across the 'pool' from the little marina. The beautiful high rock walls of a former mining quarry, now filled with the flooded lock water and bordered by a state park, made for a great anchorage for the night. BUT.... one of the dreaded fears of anchoring materialized

when, in the morning, Panacea tried to pull up anchor. Stuck. Firmly stuck. We launched our dinghies, pulled from the shore, and tried *nearly* all the tricks.

Ultimately, Captain Nick donned his snorkel, mask and swimsuit, took the plunge for the team, and freed the anchor 15' below from the snag. That's Nick's head bobbing off the bow in the photo!



Yes, Joan and Don vowed to reward Nick for his efforts and treat us to lunch and a few beers! But we banked that for the following day and stopped instead at one of the many sandy beaches for a picnic and leg-stretch as

we headed back down river with more football trash talk (btw, the Washington Huskies ultimately lost), another night at the cove by the park and then onto

Demopolis.



Even though the Ohio River had been off the beaten path, we weren't yet accustomed to the 'Looper-impact' at that point. Spending those days on the Black Warrior River was a good reminder and time away from the Looper gang -this more intimate river, narrower and more 'untouched', gave us a

renewed level of adventure and increased feeling of uniqueness. Another regret: we should have taken a couple of more days to explore further up the river than we did.

So again, my parting words of advice are: take as many side trips as you can. Enjoy them. Keep your eye out for future side trips! And don't worry about catching up to anyone you met months earlier who now have hopscotched ahead of you! Odds are, you will see them again one way or another. It's the journey...not the speed you take it nor the actual completion of the full Loop (although the latter does feel pretty awesome!). Seize each day and enjoy what it brings you.

Other Side Trips to Consider

The Tortugas

The Bahamas - We got partway 'done' until escaping under cover of darkness during the COVID lock-down. In fact, there are probably at least 5 different 'side trips' to be had in the Bahamas, if not years to spend there.

St. Johns River, Florida

Potomac River to the nation's capital

The *other* Loop (make a lop-sided figure eight and add in the Down East Loop)

Endless side trips and mini-loops in the Great Lakes (and a handful of different options to get to them)

Minnesota (from different approaches)

A ton of rivers flow into the Illinois, Mississippi, Cumberland, etc ...dams, shallow water, bridges, etc. need researching but at least a nose poke would probably be interesting.

Let us know what you find. **You can read our old blog at <https://oneifbylandtwoifbyseablog.wordpress.com/about/day-1-sept-3-2016-anchors-aweigh/>**



Chapter 31

Let's go to the Bahamas

By Susan Costa

Lucky Me

35' Tiara Sovran

Gold Looper – 2020

Are you on the Great Loop “Looping” or planning your Great Loop adventure in the next few years? Maybe you recently went “Gold” and are wondering what’s next? How about a side trip to the Bahamas? You have to admit, it’s an intriguing idea.

Many Loopers at least consider at some point taking their boat to the Bahamas, but like the Loop, it’s helpful to do some pre-planning. So how do you go from “thinking about it” to “planning” to “we are going”?

Below are 10 of the most common questions asked during our presentation on “Cruising the Bahamas on the Lucky Me”.



1} Is the Bahamas still suffering from the damage of Hurricane Dorian?

From Bahamas.com: “First thing to know is the Bahamas is vast. Like a chain of more than 700 islands and cays, including more than 16 separate destinations.

In early September 2019, the eye of Hurricane Dorian made landfall on the Abaco Islands, 12 hours later it moved over the eastern end of Grand Bahama Island, and drifted across the island. It is sad to think that some areas in the Abacos and Grand Bahama Island may need years to fully rebuild. But the rest of the Bahamas was not touched by Hurricane Dorian.

And the islands that did have damage are re-building.



Grand Bahama Island: Several tourist areas on the island have enthusiastically bounced back including many marinas, hotels, restaurants, and shops. Grand Bahamas Island is spreading the word that they are “Open for Business”.

Abacos: Sadly, it appears that some marinas in Marsh Harbour, Treasure Cay, Hope Town and the Man of War Cay area in the Abacos will not be “Open for Business” as quickly as Grand Bahama Island, although some Abacos favorites are open and ready to welcome back the boating community. Monthly updates are noted either on social media or online news services. If you plan on cruising in the Abacos in 2020 or 2021 you will need to call ahead to confirm available services.

2} My boat was/is great for the Loop, but will it be good for traveling to the Bahamas?

With two islands (Bimini & Grand Bahama) only 50 miles from Florida's east

coast, it is possible for even a modest-sized boat under 30 feet, to cruise or sail to the Bahamas. Spend a night at a marina or travel through a mooring field and you will see just about every boat imaginable: sailboats, cruisers, fishing boats, sail, and power catamarans, trawlers, and large yachts. Even boats lacking cabins and sleeping births can visit and enjoy on-site lodging at many marinas.

It is important to note that boating in the Bahamas is at times challenging. Reliable aids to navigation are often non-existent, relocated by a storm, or just a few and far between. Your trip will include crossing the open ocean with no land in sight for miles. You will navigate waters in remote areas with reefs, limestone ledge, and sandy shoals. Plans need to be made for overnights at marina docks, moorings, or protected anchorages. You need access to fuel, clean water, and for extended stays, fresh food. So, the answer is yes, most boats that travel the Loop can visit the Bahamas. Research and plan well for a safe and enjoyable trip.

3} Is it complicated to take a pet?

We do not have pets onboard, although understand that many Loopers travel with their “furry friends” to the Bahamas. We have met boaters that highly recommend the services of “Wellington” in the Bahamas to help with the application process. Visit Bahamaspetpermit.com The website has the application form, requirements, fees, and restricted breeds. You should plan up to 3 weeks from application through permit approval, although it is typically done in less time. A recent veterinary health certificate is needed. A few other requirements noted on the government website; the pet must be six months or older, must be micro-chipped and a few breeds are not allowed entry.

4} When are the best months to travel in the Bahamas?

The Bahamas Hurricane season officially runs from June 1st through November 30th. During that time of the year, there is a higher chance the islands will be hit by

hurricanes. As the weather throughout the Bahamas is enjoyable year-round, travel by boat to any of the Islands and Cays can be appreciated in any season, although



boating during hurricane season could result in challenging weather issues.

Your boat insurance policy may include travel restrictions during the six months of the hurricane season. All preplanning must include a full review of your insurance coverage and all riders before traveling to the Bahamas.

5} Will I have trouble finding good weather for crossing the Gulf Stream and traveling between the Islands and Cays?

Each morning, check the weather using multiple sources. We consult both free and paid weather services and apps such as Chris Parker Weather (paid subscription at www.mwxc.com), NOAA, Sirius Marine, Windy App, and NOAA Weather Radio. This is NOT a complete list of all-weather sources but are some we found helpful.

Know what you consider “good” or “acceptable” travel weather and what is “no go, no way”. This depends on many factors including boating experience, the size of your boat, style, and personal preference.

We highly recommend a paid subscription to Great Loop sponsor Chris Parker Weather as we found this service to be very helpful for our trip.

6} Is everything in the Bahamas really as expensive as I have heard/read? Dockage at marinas will average \$2 to \$2.25 a foot plus the 12% VAT (tax). There are some marinas as low as \$1 a foot and others are over \$4. Do

some pre-planning (Waterway Guide Bahamas, social media, and marina websites) for the average cost in the area you want to visit. Each marina will also charge you for electric (.45 to .85 per kwh) and water (.35 to .50 a gallon). A few marinas charge \$5 to \$7 per bag for trash disposal.

Just about everywhere is free to anchor and many boats do so for at least a portion of the trip.

Both diesel and gas are readily available with a bit of planning. The range for us in 2019 was \$4 to \$5 a gallon. Always fill up when you arrive as it's possible that by the time you leave the area the pump could be empty!

Frozen and fresh meats, canned goods, produce, and paper products will be available on the larger islands at grocery stores, but in general, it will cost 2x to 4x what you might pay in the states. Rural islands might only have a small one-room store with a limited supply that arrives by mail boat once a week. We recommend you bring as much as you can comfortably hold on board as your private "ship store".



7} Do I need a water maker?

We did consider a purchase as the benefits include: freshwater on-demand, personal knowledge on the quality of the water, and you do not need to plan/find a marina to "fill up & pay". But these benefits come at a cost. Portable water makers cost \$800 to \$3,000 and built-in ones can run significantly more. The smaller, less expensive systems produce fewer gallons per hour, which might not work for your water needs. Also, add in maintenance costs with filters and spare parts.



We practiced “water management”. We use an average of 20 to 25 gallons a day with showers, head, cooking, dishes, and drinking. Let’s do the math ... 2 months in the Bahamas; 60 days x 20 gallons = 1,200 gallons x .50 = \$600

8} Is it true there is no pump-out services?

This is going to sound odd but pump-out services in the Bahamas, for the most part, do NOT exist. We may have come across four marinas in eight weeks that offered pump out, and two didn’t work. You will have no choice but to go out at least three miles, use the macerator, and pump the waste overboard.



9} What is the cost and requirement to enter the Bahamas?

To enter the Bahamas, private pleasure vessels will need to check in with both Customs and Immigrations. As of January 1, 2020, the cost for boats up to 34’: \$150 for 3 months; \$300 annually. Boats 35’ – 100’: \$300 for 3 months; \$600 annually. You will also need the following: one copy of The Bahamas Customs Clearance Form, one Bahamas Immigration Card per person, passport for each person, and vessel registration documents (title/documentation/proof of ownership). There may be further restrictions due to the Coronavirus, but this seems to change monthly so check online for the latest information.

10} What island is best to visit? We can't answer this question as everyone has different opinions on what they are looking for. If you like privacy, then a quiet uninhabited Cay might be your favorite spot. If you like nightlife and activities you will want to hit the larger islands. We spent eight weeks traveling to 24 different Islands and Cays and covered over 816 nautical miles. We walked beaches for miles with not another person in sight. Other days we walked busy streets trying different restaurants, bars, and visiting shops. We recommend you do some online research on the various islands and read the most recent issue of *Waterway Guide Bahamas*.

The Bahamas are calling – I hope to see you there!



Visit our Facebook page: [Lucky Me Looping](#) or send an email to SueLuckyMe@gmail.com and I will send you a free PDF of our updated 58 page "*Cruising the Bahamas with the Lucky Me*". This book covers in more detail the information you will find helpful in the planning stage of a trip to the Bahamas.



Chapter 32

Documenting Your Great Loop Journey

By Rev Crouse

Here's To Us

50' Carver

Looper In Progress

I agreed to do the Loop before I even knew what it was.

Sam asked, “Do you want to go on an adventure?”

And I said, “YES!!!”

In hindsight, it probably would have been better to ask a few questions, but no.

I just jumped on in.

Getting Started

Our original plan was to look for the “perfect” Loop boat for a year and then spend another year learning how to do everything – turn it on, make it go, and other important things like that.

We ended up finding and buying our boat before I had even seen it. But of course, I was okay with that, I wanted adventure!

We did all the things they tell you to do.

Join America’s Great Loop Cruisers’ Association.



Get training - Get going

We left Texas and got on our boat in Baltimore, ready to start the Loop. However, all the maintenance and repairs were not completed when we arrived, and so we waited.

We got some training from a captain while we waited but after that, neither of us felt overly competent.

So, we went to the AGLCA 2019 Spring Rendezvous to learn more. Talk about overload! We did not realize how much we didn't know until that conference. We met some fantastic people, but we also freaked out. I mean really freaked out!



But on May 15, 2019, we left Cutter Marina in the Middle River area of Baltimore. A lack of training or confidence was not going to get in our way of starting America's Great Loop.

Our first cruise was a short three-hour tour to Chesapeake City, Delaware. We were hoping to be a lot more successful than the Skipper and Gilligan.

As we got closer to the city dock, there was a man walking off his boat to help us tie-up. He asked which line I was going to throw him and I honestly wanted to cry.

“I don't know!!!”

“How about the bow?”

So, I tossed him the bow line. Fortunately, I remembered to tie the other end to the boat.

We could not get the power working on the free city dock, so I spent my first night without air conditioning and I didn't care for it. At all.

Over the next year, we learned, coped, laughed, and embraced every new challenge while making up some new cuss words.

In addition to learning and adapting to the unknowns of boating and just getting around the Loop, I decided that I would document our trip. And not just write about it, but share honestly in a very real and vulnerable way what going around the Great Loop is like.

Documenting

A few weeks before we left, I asked Sam if he wanted to do a YouTube channel with me. He said *no*. I explained that it would help our family and friends see us and know we are okay. To say that they thought we were crazy is an understatement. Eventually, I wore him down and he agreed.

I also decided to write a blog to keep track of all the pictures and capture the stories along the way.

You would think that learning all the duties of a First Mate and coordinating food and beverage service would be enough, but no it was not.

So, “What Yacht To Do” was born.

Talking Heads

The first few videos we created were Sam and I talking about what we were experiencing so far. Just two talking heads. Every time we moved the boat, we created a video. I called Sam “Mr. Roboto” because he seemed so stiff and I just rambled on like I was talking to my momma because I was.

Then, one of our friends suggested putting up a few pictures so they could see what we were seeing. What a great idea! So, we started adding in pictures and videos and talking about what it is like to go on a yearlong adventure.

Blogging/Website

Many Loopers start a blog. It is a great way to add travel stories and pictures that are important to you. I also use it to keep track of the number of marinas, walls, anchors, and locks that were part of our journey.

Then, I found out about “Google My Maps” where we can put a pin for each of our stops and add content on an actual map. Very cool.

We also email a travel newsletter every Sunday.

I know what you’re thinking. That sounds like a lot of work. But you have to do something while you’re out there. Whether it’s your favorite hobby or maybe learning something new, this is an opportunity to work your brain and entertain yourself.

The Resources

Even though I had a background in computer education and marketing, I learned some new skills.

For our YouTube channel, I just use my cell phone to take pictures and videos. I save those on an external drive on my laptop computer and use Camtasia to edit. Then, I upload it to YouTube.

For our Website/Blog, I created it using Wordpress.org, the Divi Theme from Elegant Themes. It is hosted on Siteground. You could also use Wordpress.com but there are limitations and you cannot profit in any way from it. However, they host your blog for you, so this is a free and easy option.

The Rewards

Even though it takes time to create videos and write blog posts, we have received so many benefits from documenting our trip.

We have been inspired, educated, and challenged by the comments and questions we have received from previous and current Loopers as well as wannabe Loopers.

We also have an email address that we make available where anyone can ask questions, give us advice, or just connect with us.



So, not only have we met many wonderful Loopers on this trip, we have unexpectedly made many online friends. Some of these online friends have met us at ports and treated us to drinks and/or dinner. Can you believe that?

We have about 800 miles left to go before we cross our wake but once we do, we will have an entire video log, blog, and Google map so we can see where we went and what we did all around the Great Loop.

Hindsight

If I had it to do all over again, I would focus our attention on YouTube.

If you look into the camera and talk to the people that you love the most, the number of subscribers doesn't matter, and those videos will be up there long after we all are gone. What a great legacy to leave for your family!

I would encourage you to start your own YouTube channel because the more personalities out there talking about the Loop, the better.

If that doesn't appeal to you, then start a blog and use Wordpress.com or Blogger so it will be around long after you are.

If you don't know how to start a YouTube Channel or a Blog, ask your kids or grandkids. They'll get you set up.

Share

I didn't know I was going to enjoy the Loop as much as I have.

I have loved seeing so many different parts of the country up close like the Statue of Liberty, the incredible architecture in downtown Chicago, rolling down the rivers, and manatees in the Keys.

I loved waking up in a secluded, quiet anchorage.

I loved learning how to tie lines when docking, how to cook in a tiny kitchen, and how to live with a husband 24/7 in a small space.

And there has been so much to share.

Your life can be an inspiration to others if you decide to share it.

Your story is unlike any other.

Share your story.

Share your journey.

Stay in Touch

Follow our journey at www.YouTube.com/WhatYachtToDo or on our website at www.WhatYachtToDo.com. You can always email me at Crew@WhatYachtToDo.com. I would love to hear from you.



Chapter 33

From Here to There & In-Between

By Deborah Bowles

Mountain Wave 50' Navigator Looper in Progress

It all began with a simple boat card. We were at an evening party for a title company in Birmingham, Alabama, when the CEO, Brad Salvage, slipped my husband KT his boat card. We thought, now that is unusual, a card for their boat “Salvage” with a web address to a blog. So, we began to read some of his and his wife’s blog posts about their adventure on America’s Great Loop.

We were hooked!

We began to seek out information on America’s Great Loop Cruisers’ Association. We found out they had a spring and fall Rendezvous each year. The fall location was just up the road from us, so we added the trip to our list, of course. From our balcony window in the hotel at Joe Wheeler State Park, we looked down on the docks watching the different Looper boats arrive. It was so exciting! And our dream began to emerge.

We both grew up around the water, day sailing for me and racing with my Dad on a Shark Catamaran on inland lakes of Alabama. KT really had a larger perspective than I, as he grew up with his Dad being the Commodore of the Saint Claire Yacht Club. He loved to be out on the water. It didn’t matter if it was a Venture Sailboat or a MacGregor we took to the Gulf. I remember vividly one trip to Santa Rosa Island; it was so hot it was hard to sleep! Our daughter cried out in tears, “Why

can't we be like normal people and just get a condo at the beach?" KT did add air conditioning to the boat, but there was not much wind for the sailboat on the lakes near us.

We were working, and dreaming of a time when this adventure would be more than a passing thought. Well, I can say a lot has changed as we began to see that this Looper idea could be a reality. We loved the thought, and enjoyed the people at the Rendezvous. Putting on that blue ribbon that said "Planning" made everything seem more real. And we did begin to plan! The boat selection was next. So, we attended the Trawler Boat Show in Annapolis. That is where dreams and reality struggled to come together. With the help of table talks we had with Gold Loopers, and the "wake up" of the actual cost, we were able to put together a realistic list. And finally, settled on a boat.

Sabbatical to Pilgrimage

This Adventure will radically alter one's perspective on life!

Before we started, I imagined a life of tranquility. I had in my mind writing, reading, journaling, and a little photography. Oh my, how I had not understood the full scope of what our daily life would be like. We were constantly moving; every day had its own different challenges. For us being newbies, our days were also full of grace from fellow Loopers, as they shared their experiences and what they had learned over the course of years. Try to see this picture in your mind.

When we left the dock at Hilton Head, our point of origin:

- A. We had never piloted our boat (except during the sea trial for 15 minutes).
- B. We had never plotted a long navigational course in unfamiliar waters.
- C. We had never docked our vessel or any vessel that was 50' long.
- D. We had never dropped the anchor on our boat.
- E. We had never put our dingy in the water.

So off we went innocent and excited beyond our belief - we were now Loopers!

Our Broker's last words, "Be sure to let them know you are new when you book

your reservations at the marinas. They will gladly put you on a face dock.” I was so grateful we only had a short run the first day of about 2 ½ hours going north to Beaufort, South Carolina.

After our first docking “experience” and getting the boat secure for the night, a sweet couple came over to us and asked, “You guys new at this? Would you like to come over to our boat this evening and talk?” We both nodded our heads YES.

Hedy & Jim from ‘Weather or Knot’ blessed us so much that evening. We downloaded Aqua Maps which lead us to the Bob423 webpage and his tracks. We laughed and had our first taste of Docktails over new stories and advice.

Our next waypoint was in Charleston, South Carolina at a huge mega dock in a busy harbor. We pulled into a face dock over a city block long and two boats down on the face dock was a familiar boat, ‘Weather or Knot’, Hedy and Jim. They asked, “What time are you guys leaving tomorrow morning?” We said, “Oh about 8 am.”



Our new friends said, “May be better to be up before dawn and as soon as the light breaks, you should leave port. We both stared blankly at what they said next. There is a full moon tonight and the dredger is at mile marker X and you need to be by that point before 9 a.m. We smiled and went to bed thinking full moon, tide changing, wait a second is this a Looper Cult?

Gratefully, we took their advice and got past the dredge, keeping us from getting stranded on the mucky bottom (that time).

What was really happening: We were becoming part of a community. This boating community was made up of all kinds of individuals (I stress “individuals”). They are lovable, opinionated, ready for a good joke, helping and offering camaraderie to their fellow travelers.

This was not going to be a sabbatical as I had supposed. But rather a pilgrimage which took me to the edge of myself where I was humbled and stretched. During



this process, lots of other people were around me. Each was at a different point in their journey but on the same Loop.

Docktails is the perfect name for what took place late afternoons at marinas and even at anchor. It was a time of sharing stories of our day with food, beverage, and laughter. We laughed at the situations, our responses, and ourselves, sometimes challenging our knowledge and sometimes providing comic relief from the tension on the boat that day. It is a journey that gives us an opportunity to let go and laugh at ourselves with others.

On the Loop, you will see the new friends you meet time and time again. So, being positive and open to the journey adds “Life” to your life. Might as well enjoy, accept yourself and move on up or down the river. This is your time. You have made the choice to be on this amazing journey and take part in this incredible experience.

Ahead on this trip is stunning sights of nature, countrysides, towns, and communities, plus the daily challenge of the Loop.

We decided that community was important to us, and like everything else, what we needed appeared - traveling buddies.

Our traveling companions were Janet and Dave on ‘Sea Glass’ and Gigi and Mark on ‘Miss Adventure’. We had similar interests and were traveling at close to the same speed. Plus, we just enjoyed their company. It was like a gift. So together we went, Looping and sharing our lives, for this short season. We met Dave and Janet in Norfolk at the Fall Rendezvous and Mark and Gigi in Alabama at the prior Spring Rendezvous, but it was in the Chesapeake we began to travel together.

Besides traveling with our Buddy Boats, we all planned to meet our families along the way at different points and of course we met many other Loopers throughout the trip.

We traveled from the ICW, up the big water of the Chesapeake, across the C & D Canal, then down the Delaware, then up the Atlantic. As simple as this sounds, it is full. Our time at Cape May riding bikes, looking at the architecture, taking the ferry ride to Lewes, and visiting Atlantic City were eye-opening. A wonderful lady shared her love of sea glass with Janet, who in turn brought Gigi and me along. She showed us her city from a whole new perspective (& we got amazing sea glass).



Each day seemed to be packed full of life. As we left Atlantic City on a bright sunny day, we never thought that we would soon be in the fog like a marshmallow stuck over your head. We each took a different tract; we went to Manasquan in the middle of a Tuna Fishing contest, Dave and Janet went to New York City to meet family, and

Mark and Gigi up the ICW. But somewhere on the Hudson, we were together again. Then we pressed on through the Erie Canal that was flooded with debris, up the Oswego Canal, then across Lake Ontario into Canada for us, where we were rewarded with Canada's annual celebration - Canada Day. Even as we would separate and go our own way on occasion, there was still this camaraderie in a shared adventure that gives way to a connection of the heart.

So on into Canada we three boats went, each at our pace. Into the Trent-Severn and lock after lock (42 locks total). The locks are amazing. Each is so different. We marveled at their age and construction.

Once we found a little oasis in clear cool water and KT and Dave were getting ready to jump off the rocks like young kids going for a splash with your good friend next to you. I thought we had made this unique private discovery. Just then someone hollers up at you, it's Looper 'TxAu' and they are down below in the water already.



The Trent-Severn Waterway was full of gathered memories; docked alongside fellow loppers at the locks and small-towns, mooring walls, hikes, telling stories of your day's experiences and joys.



We were cooking dinner with other traveling buddies and sharing in their lives. Some places you may decide to stay a while longer. For us it was at Henry's Famous Fish 'n' Chips in Georgian Bay. I was loving my special time with my Captain KT, and he was happy with his special time with his First Mate!

We still wanted to reconnect and travel with our Buddie Boats and other Loopers again. We stopped in the Elk Rapids area for family and to bring our grandkids on board for their summer memory with Nana and Gramps. We had the opportunity to keep one grandchild aboard for almost two months. Mary Grace loved the Loopers and traveling with us. She became part of our crew as we were reconnecting with friends and new Looper boats.

That Looper burgee is your calling card on your boat. If you need help, someone to call on or offer your help. It's like wearing your team's logo, as it opens doors, friendships, and conversations with people who are thinking, like you, about traveling around our country by boat. We so enjoyed all the adventure and yet, we always had a thought; could we live here when the Loop is done?

Do Wanderers Ever Settle down?

We were going and still, there was this, "What is next in our hearts?"

We found a property in Traverse Bay, Michigan that had potential. We loved the area, the people. We could see our family and kids coming every summer. But the reality of a short season and keeping the property up during the winter put a damper on our thoughts. And, as we moved forward, the details just could not be worked out. We still thought about other potential spots. There were so many possibilities for beautiful places as we traveled.

At one point we took a small interlude away from our boat, 'Mountain Wave'. We took Mary Grace home, did some holiday stuff and I had minor surgery. As I healed and we thought about moving the boat south again we got a call. We were overjoyed when our old travel buddies, Gigi and Mark of 'Miss Adventure' called to see if we could go down the rivers together. And down we went.

We met at Aqua Marina to restock the boats. The next morning in the Snow we started down the river.

In a few days, we were finally past the bitter cold. We anchored together /stern-to-stern in Bashi Creek, a small back creek off the river. We laughed, shared dinner, played games, and talked about the future. Then, back on the rivers; the waters were high and there was flooding in some areas. We had tornado threats around us. We decided to tie up at Bobby's Fish Camp and made room for another Looper to tie up as the weather passed through. Suddenly there was a knock on the boat.

“You all need to come up to the restaurant there is a tornado in the area.” I looked at the building with a tin roof, but it was cinder block so we went up. It was a good relief from the weather and some of the staff came in to cook fresh catfish for us. And the tornado went north of us.

By now we were becoming good boaters. We could help other Loopers along the way. Our next destination was Mobile Bay. By this point, all of us were thinking about our next steps. Mark and Gigi were thinking about selling their boat, weddings, and grandchildren. Dave and Janet had left for their daughter's first baby and the desire to be home for all the activities.

We continued around the panhandle of Florida and waited in the cold winter weather for an opening to cross the Gulf. Still, thinking what could be next? As the journey starts to wind down you begin to think, “Will I keep going?” Or, “What is this new chapter going to be?” But we were not certain yet of what the next chapter would hold.

So ... the next part of the adventure could have many subtitles.

“Looper become Settlers”

“Did I stop or am I just resting?”

“What’s next?”

Or maybe this...

“What can happen if the group mentality sets in and someone buys a house?”

As we made our way down the ICW in Florida from Tampa to Fort Myers, we had thoughts of ... this could work for us, this is nice, would the kids come to visit? We had a real estate app open and were checking on *for sales* on the way down the ICW toward the Keys. Earlier in our land life, we had looked at purchasing a property in Key West and were still toying with the idea. So, on we traveled, very open-minded. Anna Maria Island was nice but not us. Venice looked good but we were still Looping along, looking at areas as potential ports for our boat. As we

came by Port Charlotte and then around Mile 18.5; we heard a voice on the open channel of the VHS “‘Mountain Wave’, I see you. This is ‘Laura Jean’.” We quickly looked up their position on Nebo, got out the binoculars, and replied, “I see you too.” We moved our conversation to another channel and asked what they were up to. Well, they bought a house in Punta Gorda. And other Looper friends were settling in the area too - Susan and Greg on ‘Lucky Me’, were about to buy a home in North Fort Myers, Tinsley from ‘TxAu’ had purchased a home in Cape Coral, and all of them knew more Loopers buying, renting and settling in the area.

Our next scheduled stop was Tarpon Point Marina in Cape Coral. We pulled into the marina and it was quite nice. The weather was changing again so we stayed for four days in that marina. Everything else in the area was fully booked. We were trying to decide if we could find a window long enough to make it to the Keys or would we cross over to Stewart and head south from there. Lots going through our minds.

But in the meantime, we were in Cape Coral, so we got our bikes off the boat and looked around. As we were on our way to lunch in Cape Coral, along Pelican Blvd., we decide to look at houses. This was just entertainment for us as we plotted our course south. KT got all excited! There was a foreclosure in our price range. I still have my Alabama real estate license, so I called the realtor and she said just go ahead and look at the property.

We looked at it and it was a lot of work to get it livable, but I noticed KT was excited, and as I got past the initial shock, so was I. Our thoughts were, this is a good middle ground. Easy airfare for our kids to visit from Alabama and Michigan. We had friends buying around us, and the prices were decent.



In retrospect, there was not a lot of forethought here. Then we found one even better, not on the main drag, with a deep enough channel for a good size boat, four beds, three baths, good condition, and we liked the house and made the offer!

Did we just buy a house??

We moved 'Mountain Wave' over to Legacy Harbour Marina in Fort Myers, where the realtor came over to the boat. We worked out the contract and submitted our offer. After not much back and forth (we just set our line as what we would pay), they accepted. We had lots of fun those days at Legacy on B dock. I met some snowbirds and went to a bible study onboard one of the boats for the next couple of weeks. We went out to dinner with friends, lots of Loopers around. KT seemed to enjoy the town activities almost every day. We could not wait for the kids to come down. So much to do in such a short time period. We took possession of the house and then COVID-19 came. We were glad we had a place to be. And our kids came to see it and stayed almost a month, but everything was closed during that time. They were happily swimming in the pool and fishing from the dock outback.



For many on the Loop, what is next is going back home. For others, another Loop around, and for those like us - a new adventure. We are renovating the house, sold "Mountain Wave" and recently purchased a smaller boat that will meet our Florida boating style. We have enjoyed getting to know the neighbors because everyone lives here full time, or if they are snowbirds, they are putting off going north until their state opens up.

And this Journey has opened new horizons for us. Open doors of friendships and opened up new thoughts we never thought possible. Are we here forever? Actually, that never crossed our minds. We are on a journey and this is the next chapter. It is very different and we do we miss our Alabama friends, but we know most of our close friends will come to visit.

Are we done traveling? No. Just a different airport and for sure a smaller boat. Can we help in our new community? Sure we will, it's who we are! We are excited to become part of this new community and help people know how much they are loved. So, what's next? An adventure awaits!!!



Chapter 34

Safely Cruising the Loop

By Barbara J. Reinken

Hallelujah

44' DeFever Offshore

Cruiser

Platinum Looper 2015

It is very important to be safe while cruising the Loop. Even if you are an experienced boater, the Loop is a very different experience. We learned this lesson on our first Loop! We have been boating for 50 years – 36 on sailboats of various sizes and 14 years on our current trawler. Our first 36 years of cruising were on small inland lakes and the Great Lakes. When we purchased “Hallelujah”, we had to start learning safe cruising all over again. We had no knowledge of tides, currents, understanding rivers, channels, intercoastal, or open ocean waterways, but we quickly learned with a variety of experiences – not reading markers correctly, going aground, and being caught in bad weather without having a safe exit plan. But traveling by boat is safer than by car and a lot more interesting than being on freeways. Seeing the USA by boat is a great experience!

In this chapter, I will give some tips on safely cruising while on the Loop and making it a very enjoyable adventure. I am focused on the first mate (usually women), but captains might find this information helpful also. We currently have 381 boat cards in our file, and as we met all these boats with crews, we found most Loopers (at least 75%) are a couple (two people) on the boat – not always husband/wife couples, but two people who are living and cruising together on a daily basis for an extended period of time. There have been AGLCA forum discussions about who is the captain and who is the admiral but little discussion

about how couples become partners while cruising. Thus, I present tips on how to move away from a hierarchal arrangement and suggest crews become partners in safely cruising the Loop.

Tip One: Know your boat.

This may sound strange but it is important both partners know the boat. By this I mean the first mate should be able to take over the wheel and steer the boat, not just in open water, but be able to dock the boat or put the anchor down. First, at least one crew member other than the captain should know how to pilot the boat and be able to get it to a safe harbor (or at least be able to get the boat to the T-head end of a pier if not into a slip). What I've seen as the norm is the crew (especially female crew members) may know how to steer the boat going straight, but about half of these crew members have no idea how to dock a boat. Yes, captains, you need to relax and teach steering and dockage or have your partner gain experience from a training captain, becoming a team so both crew members are captains.

For years, I crewed on sailboats while my husband did the wheelwork. But when we bought our Sabre 38 sailboat, I wanted to do more cruising than the two short weeks we had as a couple. Dave said I could take the boat anytime if I learned to dock and undock the boat (the most important part of any cruising day). He took time to teach me the docking procedures (which was a very interesting experience as all the men on our pier were standing around watching and taking bets that I would scratch the navy-blue hull). Of course, this led to the beginning of long summer cruises with all-women crew and many great adventures (yes, hubby stayed home to work while I went off to play in Lake Michigan, Huron, and North Channel). Having a trawler (powerboat) is much different from a sailboat – and many women have so stated they prefer sailboats over cruisers, but intimidation, fear, nervousness, etc. should be overcome. Your cruising will be more satisfying and safer when you know you can manage the boat.

Another reason for both crew members to know the boat is in case of emergency situations. We hear of situations in which one person is injured, falls overboard, or

becomes ill. When this happens, it is important for the other crew member to be able to handle the boat. From personal experience, I was able to take over the helm when my husband became ill, and get the boat to a safe harbor. I learned how to take the helm and get the boat to dock. I applaud the women on the Loop who have learned to helm their boats while docking daily and putting the boat into locks. They have great respect for their partners and all are enthusiastic Loopers.

We learned in a seminar on boating medical emergencies about the first thing the healthy person needs to do is “Scene Safety”. What this means is to make sure the boat is safe. Otherwise, there will be two emergency cases. The second step is a VHF call for help – make sure you know how to use the VHF radio and get a distress call out for help. Then, you can attend to the person’s medical issue. To this end, we have taken CPR training, attended medical emergency sessions, and learned ways to support the person in distress. We also have protocols (lists) of what to do when such an issue arises. Thankfully, we have had no major emergencies on our boats, but we have heard of others who have. In one case, the emergency was addressed by fellow Loopers, quickly moving the injured party to a fast Looper boat and getting the injured party to a hospital in less than 30 minutes. That left the wife on board to take care of the boat. In this case, she knew the boat and was able to get the anchor up, get lines set, and in two hours was pulling to a T-head dock and was off to the hospital. Thus, knowing the boat is important.

Knowing the boat also means understanding the engine room, the electrical panel, and all boat instruments – another learning curve for both of us as we moved from a single-engine sailboat to the monster engine room with way more equipment, a bridge with more instruments than one might need, and an electrical panel with 45 breakers. For us, we both know how to complete engine room checks, change impellers, tighten stuffing boxes, and look for oil/fuel/antifreeze leaks. We know how to look at Seacocks, and how to clear water strainers. We know what breakers to pull, how to analyze the electrical panel, and how to read all bridge instruments. We attend seminars regularly on engine repairs, electronics, and overall boat maintenance. We learn new things all the time.

A funny story about engine room checks took place as we were leaving Marathon, FL on the way to the Bahamas. I went down for the first engine room check (which we do about 10-15 minutes after leaving a port), to find the port stuffing box was spraying water all over. I reported the situation to Dave. He radioed to the five boats we were traveling with that we were slowing down so Barb could tighten the port stuffing box. The radio chatter back to Dave was “you have to be kidding; women don’t work in the engine room.” Evening docktails included a lot of ribbing about who should be doing engine room work. We had a good laugh.

Tip Two: Do Engine room checks regularly while traveling.

We learned from a training captain we hired when we purchased “Hallelujah” that an engine room check should be completed every hour or two. (Yes, after 36 years of sailing we made sure we could safely cruise a powerboat.) Well, we didn’t heed this advice at first and ran into trouble. We didn’t catch a slow antifreeze leak on the starboard engine and by the time we found it – heading north on the Cape Fear River, the small U hose burst and antifreeze sprayed all over the engine room. We limped back to South Port and figured out a way to temporarily fix the problem until we could reach a marine service company (and we now have spare parts to fix just about anything on our engines). We now have a rule, anytime one of us leaves the flybridge, an engine room check is completed. We log our checks so we know how often we have been in the engine room.

At one women seminar on full-time cruisers, I learned the following: You sniff, feel, listen, and look. We have a sight window in our engine room entry door, so looking in is easy – one can note if anything is moving around that shouldn’t be. When we enter the engine room, we have a clockwise procedure for reviewing all parts of the equipment. I suggest you might start with a written checklist of what to look at and what to look for. We also walk around the boat (inside and out) and feel for vibrations which aren’t normal. We are always listening, even when on the flybridge, and have learned the sounds of the boat. We have quickly been able to address issues before they become serious because we can feel different vibrations

or hear different noises. It is very satisfying and relaxing to be able to return to the flybridge and say everything is okay. It makes for a better cruising day when everything is in order and working properly. This is also a way for us to get some exercise which helps with healthy living aboard. Always think positive about what things need to be done and how to make procedures healthy experiences.

Tip Three: Be able to communicate at all times with others.

This sounds sort of funny but it is important to be able to communicate with the crew at all times. On our boat, it is a long way from the flybridge to the engine room and the line of sight is limited. We use “marriage savers” (headsets). When we leave the flybridge, we tell our partner where we are going and the approximate amount of time we will be gone – we do this especially when seas are not so calm. As mentioned above, we walk around our decks to check as part of our boat checks. Without being able to communicate with my husband, he would not see me going overboard, or if I went below and might have fallen down the stairs. And there are times when one of us left the helm and suddenly there was an issue which needed immediate attention.

Such was the case on the Tenn-Tom waterway. I left the flybridge and heard a thump which usually means something hit the hull, but Dave didn't hear it on the flybridge. I immediately looked behind the boat to see if some object popped up but didn't see anything and so reported because I was wearing my headset. As I was returning to the flybridge Dave was telling me the engines were starting to overheat. We immediately dropped the anchor (yes in the middle of the Tenn-Tom waterway) and were able to work on the engine issue. The point being, we were able to quickly communicate and we had a plan of action within one minute and were able to be safe while cruising. There was a very happy ending to this story. While this situation was not fun, we were able to congratulate ourselves on remaining calm, working through the situation, and staying safe on the water. And in the process, we became good friends with a Looper couple who stayed with us while we limped into Columbus, MS on one engine. Loopers are wonderful people

and we are glad we can rely on others when situations arise or help is needed.

Communicating with others also means having knowledge of boating terminology. Just the basics – bow, stern, port, starboard, lines, ropes, fenders, etc. (what are most needed to help the helmsman in moving and docking a boat). Again, this comes from experience, especially on sailboats with halyards and lines. This is the one suggestion that takes crew the longest to become familiar with and use regularly even in times of stress. If you are reporting a problem, having correct terminology lessens confusion on what is happening. I find I don't have a problem talking with my partner at the helm if he is doing the docking, but when using correct terminology with dockhands all bets are off. Thus, I use two languages. I will say this is the mid-ship line (Dave knows which line I'm handing off) and then say the middle of the boat so the dockhand knows which line he/she is receiving. But there are times of stress when I forget terminology and Dave has to ask for better instructions or information. For example, one time I returned to the flybridge after completing an engine room check with a couple of bolts and nuts in hand. I showed them to Dave saying the thing at the end of the port engine didn't look good – lack of language about the port shaft coupler vibration and rotation. Oops! He looked at the bolts and nuts and gave me the wheel immediately. While he couldn't understand what I was talking about, he knew there was something wrong and went to check for himself. I learned more boat language as he explained what was happening.

Communicating with others includes the use of the VHF radio and knowing correct protocols for its use. Even if you are just cruising and not on the Loop, having a working VHF radio is a very important safety instrument to have. We have three VHF radios onboard – one at each helm station and a portable for the dinghy ditch bag. For good information on radio protocol, you can find a number of documents on the AGLCA website. For us, we have only had to call the coast guard one time.

Due to anxiety, I forgot the correct protocols, thus misinformation was communicated. We now have written procedures by the radios so I use correct language when calling for support or reporting incidents. Our one call concerned

an overturned boat on Lake Michigan. As we were traveling south, we saw a small 19-foot runabout overturned and mostly submerged. If we hadn't been on station and watching, we could have hit this vessel. We called to report the boat location. We didn't see any persons in the water but were stressed. The coast guard didn't seem to care. They continued to ask what our emergency was – oops! I was using incorrect language. We finally got them to understand and were told they would have a boat out there quickly. We continued on our way. But we made sure other cruisers moving south in the vicinity knew about this hazard.

Tip Four: Maintain a positive attitude.

It has been very interesting to talk with Loopers over the past 14 years as we meet and have docktails (a really great part of Looping) and learning how and why they decided to travel the Loop. A fair number of women say they are doing it because their partner had it on a bucket list, but it wasn't really their choice. Thus, while doing the Loop, the attitude wasn't very positive. The example here is about a couple we met on our first Loop. We traveled the Mississippi with a Looper boat and when we arrived on the Tennessee River, they became Gold Loopers. The couple had started the Loop five years before, but turned around and returned home after about one month. The wife (first mate) couldn't do the Loop. They spent four years aboard for shorter time periods and she learned how to handle the boat and become comfortable aboard. The celebration was wonderful and they still have the boat after ten years of knowing them.

Some women want to be near family while others miss home activities or just miss their homes. What we have found is a poor attitude or disposition diminishes the ability to attend to a needed situation. Thus, personal or boat problems occur because you are not paying full attention to what you are doing. I suggest there be some sort of discussion so partners can reduce stress, frustration, fear, anxiety, etc. For us, the reduction of fear and anxiety on daily travel was reduced because we both learned appropriate boat handling techniques. When I learned how to helm our sailboat, it was really an emotional high – I can do this and I will be able to

travel safely. There is something to say about the *Little Engine That Could* – I think I can, I know I can, I can do it.

To address the loss of the familiar land life, many couples agree to time on the boat and time off the boat. We have many Looper couples who are like Florida snowbirds. They have time in the sun and time out of the sun. They travel a distance and then go home to the family. While many Loopers travel the full circle in one year, there are a number of boats taking multiple years to complete the Loop. We fall into the multiple-year group – but didn't start with our current approach. We had a five-year plan to travel with the sun. We sold our home, gave away cars and furniture to family. But I became depressed as I didn't want to give up my precious things. We agreed to long term storage for precious items. I wasn't depressed knowing I would have them again when we finished boating and once again had a land-based home. We did manage 16 months living aboard fulltime but returned to land due to a family health issue. Since then, we have slowed down and learned to enjoy each day. We travel on good days and have wintered the boat in different places.

To help with home activities, bringing them aboard might be feasible. I love to read, knit, and quilt. I started the Loop with a sewing machine onboard, lots of knitting, and moved to a kindle for being able to read the large number of materials I read daily (I now have an iPad). This really helped with attitude. Although I love the water and boating, I need to be active in other ways. I also love to cook, so I brought along cooking equipment I love to use – blender, mixer, wok, slow cooker, etc. Yes, I made room on the boat for all of these big items, and we used them a lot when we were aboard full time. I also started our first Loop with an exercise program a trainer helped me develop. So, I had my weights, bands, ball, and mat (they have since been left at home as I have found other ways to exercise). I have a bike also and it is used for land travel when in ports. Thus, my needs have been met. Dave had his needs met with a kindle (iPad now), a TV, and his bike. We also have kayaks and a dinghy.

There is a daily stress Loopers seem to develop. We certainly have had daily stress.

Actually, we had it when we first started boating but didn't have a name for it then. It wasn't until we started Looping, we really understood daily stress (the time at the beginning of the day or in the middle of the day when you are not sure if you are prepared to travel or continue to travel). We have found we can talk through this stress and come to a conclusion. We have a short saying on our boat: "My half of the boat isn't going there today." It is a nice way of saying I don't think I can travel today – something is bothering me. We make a joke about it. I get the port side of the boat and Dave gets the starboard side (we each get one engine). I get the galley and the aft head while Dave gets the forward head and aft walk-in closet (sometimes called the time out corner). But it is important to understand your psychological needs and address them. For example, there are times Dave doesn't believe it is a good day to travel, but I do. Instead of arguing, we make the statement about my half the boat and explain our anxiety and work out a plan. For us, this works very well. We usually don't travel, and find something fun to do or we work on the problem (such as boat maintenance).

Weather can be a big stress factor that is beyond the control of the crew. We have developed the attitude that we are retired and we don't have to be somewhere at a specific time. We meet a number of Loopers who have schedules to meet. Stress really builds when the schedule falls apart. I can't count the number of times we have seen boaters leave the harbor in iffy-to-not-good weather and either see them returning to dock or later complaining about the weather and seas. They were not safe boaters on those days. A good Looper attitude is to relax and enjoy the slow life experience of Looping. There is always something to do while waiting out weather or even boat fixes. For us, it is exploring the area where we are. As we travel each day, I read guide books, websites, charts, and other material about the area we are traveling through. When we stop, we usually have a plan for land-based activities – museums, shopping, historic sites, etc. It is great fun to visit and explore new areas of our country. We are history buffs – we love small historic towns with a history of our country or the historical battlefields of the Civil War. We also enjoy architecturally unique buildings such as Charlevoix, Michigan's mushroom houses which are very interesting.

If we are at anchor, we drop kayaks or dinghy and explore nearby waterways or islands. Last summer, we were in an anchorage and wandering around and saw a bear at the water's edge, deer in the early morning, loons in the evening, and even an eagle. What a great way to see wildlife. We love to anchor and swing on the hook. It is very peaceful and relaxing. It sure reduces stress!

In conclusion, being safe both physically and mentally will help in having an exciting, valuable, and enjoyable voyage. You don't have to do the Loop just to say you did it. Do the Loop to enjoy a way of life which is different, rewarding, and fulfilling. Reluctant boaters don't have the best time on the water, but with the few tips presented here, the attitude can change from reluctant to enthusiastic boaters who find the Loop to be a wonderful trip of a lifetime. As my examples suggest, there are situations you will encounter that reduce the enthusiasm for boating, but there are always situations in life you learn from. We view these situations as learning events and make note of changes we need to make so we don't encounter the situation again. Relax, enjoy, and cherish the experience. Take time to engage in conversations with other Loopers (and boaters) about what you might encounter the next day. Docktails are great events for engaging fellow Loopers in boating experiences and learning about living on a boat. As we have found, take one day at a time, enjoy the day – work through any situation needed, and at the end of the day, celebrate the daily activities and what you have experienced.

Please visit our blog if you wish to read about our many adventures (www.hallelujahreinken.com or google hallelujahreinken).



Chapter 35 Best Day Ever – Ottawa in Canada By Celeste Freeman God's Grace 44' Hatteras Gold Looper – 2019

My husband, Ken, and I cast off our lines from our home dock in Vero Beach, Florida on May 3, 2019, at 4:35 p.m. I finished my last day of work as a surgical RN at the local hospital an hour early, and then we were off to begin our Loop adventure. I call it the “Advencha Before Dementia” (said with a southern drawl). Life is about challenging yourself to be better. Ken was an experienced boater. I, on the other hand, was somewhat green as Admiral aboard our 25-ton ride.

Fast forward 60 days, and we were almost to the capital of Canada. I was excited to be in Canada since my family roots are traced back to France, Quebec, and then Boston. I found the Canadian people to be very polite, the cities and towns very clean, and the water pristine. Friday, June 30th, we anchored at Isle Dube Cut, off the Ottawa River not too far from Ottawa. We anchored ahead of six local boats rafted together, and from our aft deck, enjoyed their music, the singing in French, and watching people dancing on the bows of several small boats. The Canadians do enjoy their holidays, and the party has begun! The next morning at 6 a.m., we fired up our original, never overhauled, twin Detroit Diesel 8V71s, which may have rattled the teeth of our neighbors sleeping in.

Approaching Ottawa, I recommend you travel with a buddy boat to get a photo of your boat with Parliament in the background, as done in the states with the Statue of Liberty. Thanks to the encouragement of Jonathan Arthur on “Salty” we arrived

and ascended the flight of 8 locks on the morning of July 1st. He suggested we wear red and look good because we would be in the back of everyone's photos. The flight of eight is framed by parliament on one side, and the impressive Chateau Laurier Hotel on the other. This is the largest set of locks on the Rideau, which lifts boats 79' in eight consecutive locks, one after another.

There was live music, food vendors, and thousands of locals that were bused in and roaming the streets closed the vehicular traffic. The locals were so very warm, hospitable, and fun-loving! Ottawa is a beautiful and immaculate city with so much to see and do. Sample the famous poutine, which is french fries with brown gravy and cheese curds. We spent just three days there, but enjoyed every minute of it!



We rode our folding bikes for miles along the Rideau Canal, scouting our departure route. We also rode about five miles to witness the pageantry and music of the changing of the guard. Because of the multi-year Parliament renovation, the event was not being held downtown as normal. On the way back, we toured the magnificent craftsmanship of the huge, all wood, Notre Dame Cathedral built from 1841-1865. This spectacular church is a must-see for anyone visiting Ottawa! One man spent his entire career carving forty-plus wood sculptures of biblical characters, from Adam to the disciples and Jesus Christ, his talent dedicated to the glory of God. Solo Deo Gloria!

Colonel By was assigned the design and construction of the heritage Rideau Canal system from Ottawa to Kingston. Modeled after European gravity locks, many canals and locks were dug by hand to connect the natural lakes and rivers, and completed in just six years in 1832. So many engineering marvels to see in Canada by water! These historic locks are preserved and still hand-operated by kids to open both lock doors and water valves. Don't miss the Byward Market in

Ottawa, or spending a night on the free mooring balls at Colonel By Island on the way to Kingston. After that stop, a highly recommended side trip is Westport! Have a lobster roll for lunch at the historic Inn, and do NOT miss a visit to the superb museum!

Several more spectacular engineering marvels of antiquity lie ahead after the Rideau ends at Kingston. After the short trip to Clayton N.Y. to see the remarkable antique boat museum, and fuel up, we headed north on the Trent Severn waterway towards Georgian Bay and the North Channel. I encourage every Lopper to take this route!



Peterborough lift lock is truly a masterpiece of construction! Boats enter one of two large pans of water, 120' by 40', and are lifted 65' in 90 seconds. I wanted a do-over since it happens so quick! I asked Ed, the lockmaster, for a tour of the control tower. They weren't very busy so we tied up to the wall on top and went up the tower. I got to sit in his chair and I even made an announcement over the PA and then controlled the system for the next group of boats locking up. Ed also gave each of us a commemorative gold Petersborough hat pin.

There is another similar lift lock which lowers boats 45'. Then, at the end of the Trent Severn, you ride on the Big Chute rail car, on your boat, over a 60' granite hill, and back down into the water of Georgian Bay. The original rail car was completed in 1917 and enlarged in 1978. There are history lessons all along the Loop, and the Canadian locks and canal systems are incredible! The natural beauty of Georgian Bay should not be missed! The magnificence of God's handiwork is

everywhere! Close to Midland, you should also plan to visit the Church on the Rock, for Sunday morning service.

After cruising through downtown Chicago, we were in the river system traveling the Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio, Cumberland, and Tennessee Rivers. We thoroughly enjoyed the 900-mile round trip to Chattanooga and Knoxville! Highly recommended; some of our Looper friends thought that this area rivaled Georgian Bay! The locks of the TVA are also impressive, but not manually operated; the largest lock lifted our boat up 105'. We joined the Vol Navy at the free dock in downtown Knoxville right below the University of Tennessee football stadium. We enjoyed the South Carolina game from the skybox; just one more special blessing we got along our great Loop adventure! Do not procrastinate! Cast off your lines and GO!

My motto is “Don't wait for your ship to come in, swim out and meet it!”