

# GRAY MATTERS

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## THREE WOMEN AND A SAILBOAT

By Berkeley Malm, Osher Lifelong Learning Student

How many of you would have jumped at the chance of going sailing with a couple of 75 year old women, on a real sailboat, in the inland passages of Washington State and British Columbia? Well, that's exactly what I did this summer and want to tell you a little about my adventures.

My friend Lu and I have been playing tennis together for many years. One day I just happened to mention that I loved sailing and Lu tells me she has a friend Ruth she has known for 53 years since her Army days who is always looking for a woman crew to sail in the San Juan Islands and the Gulf Islands of British Columbia, would I be interested? You bet I was and soon the trip was on.

Before I tell you about the trip let me tell you a little about Ruth otherwise you won't understand why this trip was so out of the ordinary. After the Army, Ruth became a physical therapist, married, had six kids, opened a Physical Therapy business near Seattle WA. while her husband stayed home to raise the kids (why that happened is another story).

After she retired at 60 she sold her business. One day a friend took her out sailing. She had never sailed before and she fell head over heel with sailing and before she got home that day she bought herself a sailboat. All this without telling her husband Louis. She figured it was her money from her business so she could do whatever she wanted with it. What does one do with a boat when one doesn't know how to sail? Take sailing lessons of course! Again, without telling Louis, that's what she did. One day Louis offers to drive her wherever she was going that evening and that was the first he heard about his wife's new

"love". Louis instead of hitting the ceiling or having a heart attack at the news stayed in the class with his wife. As they say: "If you can't beat them join them". She became such a good sailor, that

after a few years she decided to open a women's sailing school to teach other women how to sail and impart her passion for sailing and the sea. She did it so well that now she has a large group of women sailors in the Seattle area who are as passionate for the sport as Ruth is and some even have their own sailboats. They take off on sailing trips for two or three weeks at a time leaving all husbands behind. Ruth refuses to have a man on her sailing trips, no matter who he is, not even dear Louis whom we all call "Saint" Louis, a name well deserved and appropriate for him.



**THE CREWS OF THE PAY OFF AND QUELQUE JOUR**  
*Ruth (skipper of the Pay Off) in the front right next to Berkeley, holding the wheel and Lu Lanson behind her on the left. In-between is Faye Clerget (skipper) next to Ruth, Nancy Thorp and Susan Fitzgerald crew of the Quelque Jour*

Early July, Lu and I left for Seattle for our great adventure. Ruth picked us up at the airport and drove us to their magnificent dream house two and a half hours from Seattle where she lives near a marina where she keeps her sailboat. She had always dreamt of having a house and a dock where she could have a sailboat. Three years ago her dream came true.

On July 7, after stocking and loading up all our food and gear we motored out of Pleasant Harbor for our great adventure. Our first misadventure came when we overflowed the water tank, flooded the bilges and discovered that both bilge pumps weren't pumping. After Lu and I emptied the bilges by hand...grumbling "is this what we came here for?" We headed to Oak Harbor where we arrived late on the 8<sup>th</sup> after spending the night in Port Ludlow Harbor. We spent almost every night in a marina tied up at a dock. It was interesting to see the reaction of people in the marina when we

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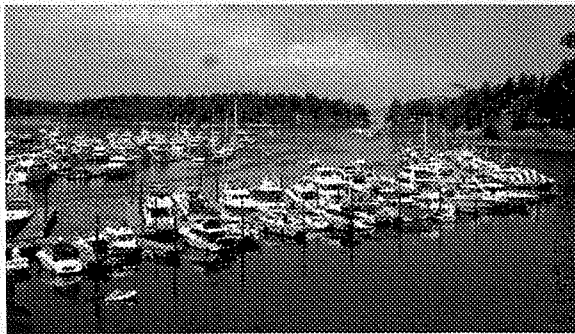
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motored in and saw only women emerging from the cockpit and NO men! A couple of nights were spent tied up to a buoy in a sheltered cove. We would have to take the dinghy with its outboard motor to go to shore if we wanted to explore the island.

After we had the bilge pump fixed we headed to Anacortes to meet a friend of Ruth's, Faye who was going to join us with her crew of two: Nancy and Susan on her boat **Quelque Jour**. Our boat was named **Pay Off**. Can you guess why? She's a 37-foot Bénéteau sloop with a 47 ft mast and has a 5 ft wing keel. We spent the rest of the trip sailing, either in sight of each other or we went our own way with the understanding that we would meet at a marina agreed upon by Ruth and Faye and her crew. We took turns cooking every night and eating on each other's boat.

Usually, unless we had a particularly long sail, we would leave the Harbor around 9 AM sail or motor depending on the winds, currents, tides and where we had to be that evening. The night we were to make dinner for **Quelque Jour's** crew we ran out of propane. The following day we had to get to Friday Harbor to fill our tank. One day we went along Orcas Island and actually saw a pod of Orca whales. One did a flip right in front of us to show us his white and black belly. Very exciting. We stopped that night at Rosario Harbor and went to an organ concert at the Thomas Moran house (built in 1906), which is now a resort.

During the period of long sailing or motoring there was plenty of time to talk, tell stories and learn what ever there was to learn about sailing such as using the GARMIN which is a global positioning system known as GPS now used in many cars. What an incredible wonderful gadget when you are in the middle of nowhere! It pinpoints your coordinates, which you then look up on the marine chart. This tells you exactly where you are at that moment. You then enter the coordinates of where you want to go and on a little screen it shows you what direction you want to go, how far it is (as the crow flies),



*View of Roche Harbor  
Roche Harbor is where you can go through  
customs before reentering the US from Canada*

how fast you are going and how long it should take you to get there (ETE= estimated time of entry). How sailors ever sailed without a GPS is hard to imagine especially in the middle of the ocean. It was fun to use and learn how to read it and find our position on the map.

We sailed into British Columbia on the 11<sup>th</sup> and stopped at several islands there such as Ganges on Saltspring Island, Genoa Harbor where that evening a sailor played TAPS from his boat anchored out. Every one from the other boats came top deck and clapped and whistled when he was finished. A very moving moment that still brings tears to my eyes when I think about it.

We eventually went as far north as Vancouver Island B.C. and docked in Sidney Harbor. From there we took a bus to Butchart Gardens to visit the gardens and see their famous fireworks. What a great show!

Some other mishaps and scares: the water pump stopped working: no problem says Ruth- under the sink she goes with a wrench to tighten something —“try the pump again” she tells me – still no luck – finally after 3 tries she gets up off the floor and says: “do you think by any chance we've run out of water?” You can guess the answer. A couple of times we got a little too close and personal with the bottom of the ocean. There's nothing much worse than that scrapping sound coming from the bottom of your boat. At least we didn't have to rock it back and forth to get it off whatever it was on. Another day we anchored out (our first time), got in the dinghy to go to shore, looked back and

thought **Pay Off** was dragging anchor. Panic. We made a bee line back to the boat to find out it was a false alarm. In spite of what Ruth was always telling us:” if anything can go wrong it will go wrong on a sailboat” we didn't have anything dangerous, traumatic or life threatening happen to us thanks to Ruth's seamanship. Or maybe it was because when we first set out, Ruth warned us that we were to do everything she told us or “you'll die”! That sure made us sit up and take notice. Every evening when we had our gin and tonic in hand she would raise her glass and say:” “we're still alive” then burst out laughing. Another of her sayings was:” there's nothing I'd rather be doing than what I'm doing right now” and I can assure you she really meant it.



*Ruth at the helm going through  
La Conner Channel*

We returned to Pleasant Harbor, where we started on July 22<sup>nd</sup> in one piece – boat and crew - and still talking to each other!

It was a fabulous trip I will never forget especially Ruth with her ready laugh, her sailing skills, her good nature and above all the friendship we experienced during those two weeks in those cramped quarters. I left WA feeling I had made some good friends and learned a lot about sailing but not quite enough to go out and buy my own sailboat. But if she calls with another offer of sailing I will be on the next plane out!

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## REMINDER

If you have not handed in your travel survey form please do so as soon as possible.

ThankYou!

The Osher LLI Staff