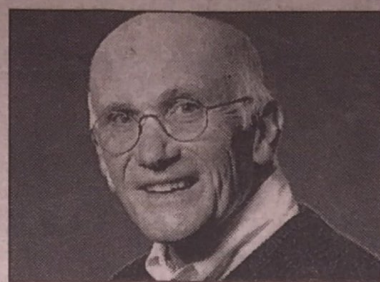


Boating dreams beat reality

"Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats." Thus spoke the Water Rat in "The Wind in the Willows." Human beings apparently agree. The marinas of the world are filled with boats. But many of them never seem to leave their moorings. Why is this? Perhaps because the dream of messing around in boats is rosier than the reality. It's also said that the two happiest days in a boat owner's life are the day he acquires his boat and the day he sells it.



George Gurley

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Nevertheless, the dream of owning a boat dies hard and unpleasant memories of life aboard ship are fleeting. My wife and I had chartered live-aboard boats before and each time concluded that the seafaring life wasn't for us. Ship quarters are claustrophobic. Marine toilets are notoriously vindictive. Sleeping in a V-berth is like sleeping in a coffin. According to another saying, "There is no lesson in the second kick of a mule." At my age, I should have learned what I like and don't like. But in the August heat of landlocked Kansas, it's easy to yield, like Ishmael in "Moby Dick," to the seductive summons to see "the watery part of the world."

An online ad for the Vancouver boat rental agency showed Arthos, a 27-foot trawler, anchored in a secluded, idyllic bay. The layout was cozy but ingeniously designed to accommodate a kitchen with stove and refrigerator, sleeping quarters, dining space, even a TV. The

boat was equipped with a dinghy and grill. Crab pots and fishing gear were offered, inspiring visions of bouillabaisse, grilled salmon, etc. Folly beckoned. I was ready to sell the house, buy a boat and spend the rest of my life at sea.

On the day we took possession of the Arthos, the rental agency was in turmoil. Someone had run one of their sailboats aground. The boat had been brought to the dock. Men with scuba gear were examining the damage, which they estimated to be \$30,000 minimum. It was ominous. A look at the charts revealed hazards such as "Shipwreck Rock." Going through the passage to our Gulf Islands cruising grounds during flood and ebb tides was likened to being tossed in the churning waters of a washing machine.

The boat's bathroom was about the size of a telephone booth. The shower consisted of the sink's faucet attached to a tube. The cruising guide

was filled with warnings of gale force winds and unsafe anchorages. By the second day we remembered why it was that 25 years ago we'd said, "Never again." We ended up docking at marinas every night, using their toilets and showers. It had all the romance of an RV camp.

The best part of the trip was the characters we encountered. We met adventuresome elderly folk who'd sailed the Greek Islands, the Baltic and the South Pacific. We met a fellow from Belgium who was doing a prosperous business renting out a donut-shaped boat for puttering around in Vancouver's harbor, grilling hot dogs and drinking beer. Most memorable was a young man with stringy hair and beard wearing a conical Chinese hat who captained a water-taxi. He'd bought a 36-foot 1975 vintage boat for \$23,000, though he didn't know how to sail — his girlfriend was teaching him. What was his ultimate goal?

"Circumnavigation!" he cried with an ecstatic smile. No fear of the Roaring Forties, of turning turtle, of being attacked by pirates or of running out of money. He was the incarnation of youth. On our last day we saw a man carry his comatose mother from her wheelchair to the cockpit of his sailboat. She was half asleep. A nurse fed her with a spoon. But off she sailed with her son at the helm. Who knows what images of distant isles and seas visited her ageless dreams?

— George Gurley, a resident of rural Baldwin City, writes a regular column for the *Journal-World*.