

What Do Women Really Want?

The motivations for women to go cruising are as diverse as the sailors themselves. From "Cruising Connections" in our October 2007 issue.

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By Amanda Swan Neal ([More articles by this author](#))



Amanda Swan Neal

Brigitta Kopperud circumnavigated during retirement, after a childhood spent reading adventure and travel books, then a career as a flight attendant.

In 30 years of ocean sailing, I've met more than a thousand women who've been interested in learning more about the cruising life. I've instructed hundreds of women on making their first ocean passage, and I know many accomplished female crew who've successfully gone cruising. I'm also the author of *The Essential Galley Companion*, a book of recipes and advice—not a dating service, as many men, after looking only at the cover, amusingly conclude. Since 1998, I've maintained detailed correspondence with more than 40 women who've cruised offshore. For 12 years, with my husband, John, I've presented cruising seminars and conducted offshore hands-on sail-training expeditions with sailors seeking passagemaking experience. And I've moderated many women's panels at boat shows.

Although my presentations intrigue women, my intuition and personal experience remind me that what women really crave is encouragement, insights, and support from one another about how to make the cruising dream their own. This, the first article of a four-part series, reflects my conversations with women about what they're looking for in the cruising life, how they make it work best, and what options there are today that make it more attractive than ever before.

What's Your Motivation?

Anyone can travel, but going cruising requires each woman to find her own motivation. We approach cruising differently than do men. We sail for different reasons, and we stop for different reasons. Our goals and needs are different, and most important, what we learn from our voyaging is different. When you discover, or create, your own motivation to go cruising, you'll encounter a new passion for learning, life, and happiness. There may be one driving factor that motivates you to go—to collect textiles or to scuba dive, learn about native cultures, or read books without the interruptions of daily land life—or it may be many factors.

Personal adventure, many women tell me, is one of the main reasons prompting them to go cruising. It motivated Shannon Miller of *Wind Rose*, a Catalina 25. "I think one of my big desires is to unplug from American culture," she says. "As my husband, Doug, and I are raising our kids, ages 1 and 3, it's easy to see a whole life mapped out, with the minivan, soccer practice, and all that. This seemed like a very safe, predictable life, and part of me could be satisfied with it, but there's another part that craves really wringing all there is out of life. All the comforts that seem to be so nice might just be cocooning me from the big, beautiful world. Those niceties will always be there. But this precious time as a family, while we're young and healthy, won't."

For some women, the dream of going cruising may start by reading books and may not be achieved until later in life.

This was the case for Brigitta Kopperud of *Maria Two*, a wooden Wittholz 52-foot ketch built in 1986. "When I was a little girl, I read a lot of adventure and travel books," she says. "In my 40s, I flew all over the world while working as a flight attendant, and I decided that someday I'd love to sail in the South Pacific. Ten years later, when I retired, we sailed from Norway to the South Pacific, then on around the world."

Doing It for Him?

Sometimes I meet women who are planning on going cruising to fulfill external expectations, usually that their partners have the dream of going cruising. Events then tend to unfold along two broad paths. In one scenario, the woman says, "Right. I realize this is an important dream of my husband's. It's not my dream, but our relationship means a lot to me. I'll give it a try as long as I feel safe and comfortable." Couples tread the other path if the woman's decision to go is overwhelmingly reluctant, and this probably leaves each partner unhappy in the end.

Laura Cagliero of *Indeed*, a Hallberg-Rassy 46, chose the first path. "We were living and working in San Diego when my husband proposed that we learn to sail," she says. "When we'd finished our lessons, he suggested that we get a boat. Soon after, Giorgio said he was bored with harbor sailing and said that we should go to Catalina. That trip wasn't a big success for me because we made a lot of mistakes. I learned that I had to be more prepared. Giorgio proposed that if we got a stronger boat, I'd feel safer and more comfortable. He suggested that we buy a boat in Sweden and sail it to San Diego. By nature, I always imagine all the bad things that could happen. But I trust Giorgio, and I decided to start looking at going cruising as a big experience we could do together.

"We had two years to prepare, so we chartered different boats and took an offshore-sailing expedition in the South Pacific. Giorgio was brilliant on the boat. But it always seemed that I learned only three things to his 12. I worried about crossing the Atlantic. To ease my worries, we decided to do the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers and invite experienced friends to join us on the new boat. After our first week at sea, I realized it wasn't as bad as I'd feared—it was really nice! We cruised for two years, with help on the difficult passages and a visit home from Tahiti. I'm delighted that I helped Giorgio live his dream. I got to visit special places I never would've seen otherwise."

Many ways exist to help a partner live a dream. If long passages scare you, fly out to meet the boat once it's in port. Perhaps part-time cruising—half a year cruising, half a year at home—would be a good compromise. If you have a dream of your own that has nothing to do with cruising—renting a house, say, in the South of France for a year—have the courage to tell your partner. Perhaps the two of you can make room in your future to fulfill both dreams. No law says going cruising has to mean selling everything and sailing over the horizon forever. Be creative. Open yourself to different scenarios.

Personal Challenges

Some women initiate the cruising dream, viewing it as an opportunity for personal achievement and growth. Others come to it skeptically. Lorna Mongell of *Evergreen*, an Allegro 33 sloop built in 1981, gave it careful consideration before finding her own motivation. "I thrived in Auckland, New Zealand—dinners, shows, theater, and outings with friends," she says. "I was surprised, and reluctant, when my husband suggested that we go cruising. But then I thought it through. I enjoy the little challenges that add up to a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day. I missed that. I'd retired from working for a corporation for 15 years, the house was paid for, and our three sons had left home. I became attracted to cruising by the amount of knowledge it would require."

When my dad first proposed that our family go cruising, I don't think it was with much consideration for my brother and me. It was most certainly his dream. He motivated us into helping him build our two cruising boats by telling enticing stories of the experiences we'd have. My mum was a schoolteacher and open-minded to the idea. Her motivation was her family. She viewed cruising as an opportunity to spend family time together, and she decided that this learning lifestyle for her children was more intellectually challenging than the suburban life.

Annette Meins Pedersen of *Scafhogg*, a 40-foot, one-off steel sloop built in 1985, shares the same view as my mother. "We'd just finished restoring our house, and we were content in it, with good jobs and schools," she says. "Anders came home one day and suggested that we sell everything and go to sea. I slept on it. It was a chance for adventure and to be with my husband and two children. I said yes."

Giving Back

Cruising offers the chance to expand our circle of friends, both with fellow cruisers and with people from different cultures. For me, this is one of the alluring factors about cruising, and I certainly share the views of Mavis Norman of *Kaien*, a steel Waterline 444 built in 1990.

"I love traveling," she says. "Cruising appealed to me because it allows you to visit and explore places while having the comforts of home. You approach a country unconventionally, and people view you differently. It's not the same as flying in at an airport with a bag of luggage. You can invite new friends on board for a cup of tea, really get to know each other, and become part of the culture."

Making a positive contribution is a passion for some cruisers. I've known cruising women who've volunteered at schools and orphanages, helped local artisans learn new techniques, organized local children to clean up beaches, and offered their services at medical and dental clinics. Along with adventure, volunteering is also one of Shannon Miller's motivations to go cruising.

"Doug and I get excited by different parts of cruising," she says. "He's all about tackling any adventure he can find. What gets me excited is getting to know local people and helping out in the local schools. We'll work those different aspects into it for both of us."

Follow Your Own Talents

Because I'm a dancer and textile artist, cruising is very attractive to me. I love meeting local women and learning how they incorporate art and tradition into their clothing through design and local fabrics. I have fond memories of my Tahitian friend Henari patiently teaching me how to weave a flower crown. I practiced as my husband, John, and I sailed through the South Pacific, and I wore a new crown ashore when we visited my friend Jean, in a remote village in Vanuatu.

After the formal village greeting, I was extremely honored when Jean shyly hinted she'd like to study my crown. When I offered to show her how to make her own, she smiled with delight and went running about the village gathering friends and flowers. Oh, how we all laughed and chatted that afternoon as we sat in the shade weaving away while the young children silently gazed at the white ghost taking their mothers' attention.

For women especially, cruising may not be at all about the sailing. While some enjoy expanding such hobbies as painting, bird-watching, music, drawing, and knitting, others take on needlepoint, photography, writing, and jewelry, and by doing so, they enrich their cruising lives.

More often, though, cruising for women may be about creating opportunities for personal growth and building relationships with loved ones as well as with new friends along the way.

Amanda Swan Neal sailed in 1989 aboard Maiden, the first all-female team to complete the Whitbread Round-the-World Race. She and her husband, John, conduct offshore sail-training expeditions aboard *Mahina Tiare III*, their Hallberg-Rassy 46. Contact them at their website (www.mahina.com).



Learning Styles Differ

Part II of a four-part conversation among women explores the ways in which learning to sail and cruise is gendered. "Cruising Connections" from our December 2007 issue

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By Amanda Swan Neal ([More articles by this author](#))



John Neal

Amanda Swan Neale was a professional sailmaker and rigger before joining the first all-female team to sail around the world in the Whitbread Race.

Cruising is far more than just sailing. It's an adventurous lifestyle immersed in nature and foreign cultures. Going cruising brings responsibilities. You and your partner must learn to become as self-sufficient as possible. Yes, this is work, and it's not for everyone, but with a commitment to learning what you need to know, your experience will be fulfilling and rewarding. Unfortunately, you're entering a lifestyle in which many technical sailing books—except *The Voyager's Handbook* by Beth A. Leonard—are written by men.

When their partners suggest going cruising, many women don't instantly embrace the notion. If you're reluctant about going long-term cruising, I urge you to avoid dismissing the idea out of hand. First, look for advice and information from women who've cruised, and seek out learning environments that are women friendly. Visit boat shows, and attend women's sailing seminars. *The Cruising Woman's Advisor: How to Prepare for the Voyaging Life* by Diana Jessie provides advice and perspectives from several women who've been cruising or are still out there.

Women often tell me that they're concerned about so much change and challenge. They like the security of their homes and being near their families. If this describes you, then pick up a copy of *Changing Course: A Women's Guide to Choosing the Cruising Life* by Debra Ann Cantrell. This book offers experiences from women who set sail with ambivalence and a little trepidation only to have their lives become more rewarding and meaningful. It's also beneficial to get your partner to read this book so he can better understand your point of view.

Learning to sail and acquiring cruising skills takes time and commitment, but you and your partner will be better off if you know what you're doing. Lessons, flotilla charters, sailing with friends, and chartering can all help build your confidence. Only when you have an understanding of sailing and your boat will you let go of limitations—such as the fear of heeling—and start to embrace the nuances of life aboard. *Sailing: A Woman's Guide* by Doris Colgate is a book for women who want a calm, thorough introduction to sailing. Another book that will help you learn what you need to know to become a competent cruising sailor and make the most of your time on the water is *It's Your Boat, Too* by Suzanne Gieseemann.

Timing Is Everything

Give yourself plenty of time to learn the cruising skills you'll need. Moe Carrick sails Talapus, a 30-foot Robert H. Perry-designed Baba, and she learned the lesson of taking her time when she joined my husband, John, and me for

the passage from Hawaii to Prince Rupert, British Columbia. She later wrote about that experience on the website of the EDT Alliance (www.etedalliance.com): "I've often cruised aboard my own boat, and I've done numerous charters around the world. Nonetheless, I had this nagging imposter syndrome, the feeling that I didn't have what it takes or the knowledge necessary to make a long ocean voyage. On my first ocean passage, I learned that 'seep time,' the critical downtime between learning experiences, is truly the soil in which mastery grows. The experiences build on themselves and accumulate over hours, days, and years. This lesson is a profound one for me when applied to my career, working with managers trying to master new ways of helping their people do their best work."

When learning new skills, seek a safe, supportive, and non-condescending environment in which you have the opportunity to discuss what you're being taught. Ensure that your teacher is a facilitator of information, guiding your quest for knowledge, rather than simply a supplier of facts.

Teaching on Mahina Tiare, our Hallberg-Rassy 46, has shown me that men and women learn tasks very differently. For instance, if I show a man how to reef, he'll go off and do it—perhaps making mistakes along the way, but exhibiting the confidence that he'll figure everything out. On the other hand, shown the same technique, women tend to take a step back, study the situation, and ask a lot of questions. Then, once they feel they have all the information, they'll do it. These ways of tackling a task can clash on a cruising boat, a place where many women discover that their husbands aren't the best teachers. Learning in a well-organized supportive environment with books, diagrams, and testing can often fast-track your learning and keep you focused. It worked for Elaine Zameruk on Goolka, a 36-foot Fraser. "I got into sailing after meeting people who sailed," she says. "After doing some trips to the Bahamas and the United States, I took courses on Glenmore Reservoir, in Calgary, Alberta, with the Calgary Yacht Club. When I met my partner, I started learning all over again with courses at the Canadian Power and Sail Squadron. I've now been cruising for two years, and I still have so much to learn. I often go back to books to brush up."

Learning on your own or from a self-taught individual generally proves to be a slower, more frustrating, and less comprehensive method than studying with a sailing school, but sometimes it's the only option. Debbie Carere, of Gungha II, a 47-foot Alan Buchan sloop, was lucky. "I learned to sail from my husband, who's a very positive instructor. Mike never yells," she says.

Only you can determine your best learning pace. By being assertive and actively involved in the learning process, you're taking responsibility for yourself, and that will give you a world of confidence. Draw on your foundation of life experiences and knowledge to help you to relate to the theories, concepts, and practicalities of sailing.

"When Brian and I got married and were developing the idea of going cruising at some point in our lives, I felt that I didn't know enough about sailing," says Barbara Robertson, who sails Red Shoes, a Hallberg-Rassy 40. "So I took a formal course run by a British instructor over several weekends on a 35-foot sailboat. I felt much more confident on our own boat afterward. I also took some coastal- and celestial-navigation courses, and when we ordered our boat, I took a practical offshore-training course that was vital to my confidence building and skill development. The more information and knowledge I have, the more confidence I'll have in stressful situations, like sailing at night. It was important for me to do these educational programs on my own, without Brian."

Setting Goals

Be clear with your instructors about what skills you want to acquire. Voice your fears, and focus on learning the aspects of cruising that will be most useful to you. You may not be interested in the detailed theory of celestial navigation, for instance, but you'll need to be proficient at plotting your position and course.

Concepts should start with something familiar, and they must have relevance to you, as Kopi Carmine of Martha Rose, a 37-foot Ed Monk motorsailer, realized. "I learned the basics of sailing going down the coast to Mexico, but it didn't make much sense until I sailed a dinghy," she says. "Being in a small boat by myself finally taught me the effect of sail trim."

Once you've been introduced to them, be sure to allot time for absorbing new sailing skills. Learn from your mistakes and move on; don't dwell on them. "Doing things over and over as well as taking classes is helping me the most," says Shannon Miller of Wind Rose, a Catalina 25. "So part of our pre-departure plan is for me to take as many classes as possible. When we sail around Puget Sound, I make sure that I do all the technical parts of sailing without Doug's help."

To fully enjoy cruising, you must know what you're doing while you're on board; you must not rely totally on your partner. It's your responsibility to get the knowledge you need, and the best way to get it is on your own. Cruising

requires that you leave your comfort zone. But if you're the type who already enjoys small adventures and challenges with nature—and many women do—you'll most certainly enjoy cruising, and you'll gain confidence by having your own base of knowledge. Even after a lifetime of long-distance sailing, I understand that I'll never know everything there is to know about cruising. It's full of surprises that keep me challenged—and continually learning. Perhaps that's why I still love it.

Next month, we'll talk about how to address fears and nurture our emotional lives. See you there!

Amanda Swan Neal and her husband, John, conduct hands-on sail-training expeditions aboard Mahina Tiare. For more information, visit their website (www.mahina.com).

Courage at Sea

In Part III of this four-part series, women share their greatest fears and exchange ideas on how to overcome them. In "Cruising Connections" February 2008

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By Amanda Swan Neal ([More articles by this author](#))



Courtesy of Robin Owen

Robin Owen and her husband, who sail Whisper, a Hallberg Rassy HR 42, needed help to plan their passages, so they hired a professional weather router.

Emotions have an enormous influence on women's lives. They guide us, connect us, and distinguish us. They can also overwhelm us. But sailing is an activity that has little room for emotional paralysis. When you feel fear, analyze what's causing it, then work out a solution so it doesn't interfere again.

Fear comes in many forms, including dread, alarm, apprehension, and worry, and they're all an indication that danger is lurking nearby. As a woman, you may experience fears and concerns for your personal safety that are different from the ones felt by men. When you sense danger, the degree of perceived danger determines the level of fear you experience. An awareness of danger in sailing is essential in keeping you safe, but if the adrenaline that causes fear races through your system, your reactions may be unpredictable. Fear such as this occurs when you're not in control.

"My biggest fear is losing my husband overboard at night while I'm asleep," says Carol Noel, who sails on Elyxir, a Westsail 43.

"Being hit by a ship or hitting a container are my biggest fears," says Lesley Swan of Swanhaven III, a 41-foot Arthur Robb yawl.

"When our journey will last several days, my biggest fear is always the weather," says Linda Dawkins, on Aquila, a Hylas 49. "I always worry if we'll know what to do if the weather turns really bad."

Don't run away from your fears and dreams: Face them. Education, safety rules, established procedures, communication, and equipment all can help. Focus on what it would take to alleviate a particular fear, then act on that.

"My biggest fear is losing my partner overboard," says Shelly O'Brien, who sails Whisper, a Pearson 424 cutter. "So I insist that we strictly observe two rules: From dusk onward, we don't go into the cockpit without a safety harness securely hooked. And no one goes forward out of the cockpit without notifying the other person, day or night, regardless if the other is sleeping. Also, before we leave on a passage, I've assumed responsibility for our emergency preparations."

"Freighters are my biggest fear," says Mavis Norman of Kaien, a 44-foot Waterline. "So we bought a night-vision scope. It's terrific. Now we can identify unlit boats, fishing traps, and harbors. The scope took a little of the fear out

of night sailing and gave me more confidence."

"For me, weather was a stressful issue," says Robin Owen, who sails a Hallberg Rassy HR 42 that's also called Whisper. "While at sea, we always wondered whether to keep moving or slow down, and when we were ashore, we never knew when to go. Choosing the best time to leave on the volatile passage from Fiji to New Zealand was very stressful. It was sucking the fun out of cruising. We decided to hire a professional weather router to give us advice. It was a major relief to have someone watching the fast-moving weather patterns with us and advising us when to go."

Take control. If you fear that the mast will fall down, get a rigger to check your mast and rigging. If you fear sailing in heavy weather, practice heaving to with your partner when the weather's fine. If you fear being alone on the boat to rescue a crew overboard, insist on inviolate harness rules and practice retrieval with you in charge of the boat.

Gaining Courage

To be courageous, three factors must be present: skills and education, an awareness of danger, and physical and mental endurance. When one of these factors is missing, the remaining two factors create a counterproductive emotion we recognize as fear.

Imagine that you're on your first overnight sail. You're on watch by yourself while your partner is sleeping. You're under full sail. You see on the radar that a squall is fast approaching. You know there's a possibility that it could have strong winds that might cause the boat to heel severely or damage the sails. What do you do?

You know how to reef because you've practiced it until you were comfortable. But you're worried that if you make a mistake while reefing, the boat will heel with the increasing wind, you may slip and fall, or something unforeseen may happen. So you wake your partner, ask him to be on deck to look out for you, and you put on the deck light. Clipping onto the jackline before going forward, you execute a perfect reef in the increasing wind. You've courageously reefed in the dark in 20 knots of winds and have gained confidence in doing so. Here's the same scenario with one factor missing from each step:

Worried about the increasing wind, you quickly run forward to reef without being clipped on or waking your partner. At the mast, you realize that you didn't account for the dangers of working unclipped by yourself on a dark deck during a squall. Knowing that you're taking an unnecessary risk, you feel foolish and afraid.

Or you wake your partner and ask him to take a reef, as you can't remember all the steps. And you don't think you have the strength to do it in 20 knots. You help out in the cockpit by easing the main, but because you don't try to tuck in the reef yourself, you feel inadequate.

Or you wake your partner to ask him to take in a reef because you don't know how. But he's really seasick and can't help. Knowing you could face a dangerous knockdown if you don't take action, you clip on and go forward to do something, anything, to get the sails down. But without practiced knowledge of what to do, you feel inept and scared.

Once, just before completing the Whitbread Round-the-World Race, I felt major fear. I was up the wet mast in a rough sea trying to fix a broken genoa halyard, and my whole life flashed before me. I became panic-stricken and froze. When the shouts of concern from below me beat a path through to my thoughts, it dawned on me that I had to get moving because I had a job to do.

With the perspective of time and experience, I now know why I felt fear up the mast. I had the skills and education, and I was physically and mentally fit, but I'd taken a foolish risk. Normally, I'd go up the mast wearing only a single layer of clothing so I'd be lighter for the girls winching me up and so I'd have freedom to climb. But when the genoa halyard broke, it needed to be dealt with instantly, so I went aloft in all my kit, including my heavy jacket. Feeling very constricted and cumbersome, I was unable to climb with ease, and it frightened me. What a fool I was to put myself in danger because I didn't take the time to dress down.

When you've been through an incident in which you've found courage, you've also been through a priceless learning experience.

Nancy Brown, on the Shearwater 49 Askari, gained confidence being at sea through experience, education, and communication. "I don't have any big fears about cruising anymore, but I used to," she says. "I'd be so nervous when freighters were on the horizon. But now, we've been by so many that it's no big deal. The flash cards I studied

to learn more about them really helped. Sometimes I'll call a ship on the radio to ask what its heading is, just to make sure. They love talking to a woman!"

You begin to trust others when you believe that they have the courage to do their best in all situations and that they'll acknowledge when they don't. Aboard a boat, crew responsibility needs to be established so that order and duty can be maintained and chaos avoided. Responsibility only comes when three factors are clearly present: trust, motivation, and confidence.

"Bad weather is my greatest fear," says Judi Nester, on Long Passages, a Shannon 38. "So I took responsibility for learning about it. I monitor it and keep a written log so I can discuss it with my partner and other cruisers. Understanding the weather allows me to help determine our course and makes me feel a little more in control."

The Five-Year Plan

Establishing a cruising plan gives you goals and a time frame in which to achieve them. For most people, it seems to take at least three years between the time a cruising plan is hatched and the day they slip the lines.

"My husband, Dee, works on five-year plans," says Suzanne Du Plessis; they sail Kwela, a custom 36-foot Corrida cutter. We bought the hull and decks, then spent four and a half years building the interior while I ran a restaurant and Dee worked as a diamond diver. We lived aboard for a year to see if we could get along together, and then we left. We've now been cruising six years—my promised honeymoon around the world!"

Judi Nester also believes in the five-year plan. "I'd been sailing since my 20s, and I dreamed of sailing to Australia," she says. "My partner, Bob, and I lived aboard for five years before leaving. That time gave us confidence. We really knew our boat."

Nancy Brown believes five years isn't enough. "Ours was a 20-year plan," she says. "You have to take your time, otherwise you don't know what you're in for. I found that many first-time cruisers we met in Mexico were frustrated with the cruising lifestyle because they were trying to do and learn everything at the last minute, under stress. They didn't have time to absorb all the information."

If you're new to cruising and want to learn on a faster track with a safety net, consider joining a cruising rally. That's what Brigitta Kopperud and her husband did, sailing Maria Two, their 52-foot Wittholz ketch, in the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers. "Our dream was to sail around the world," Brigitta says. "We're now in Fiji, nearly halfway. When we started outfitting the boat, we decided to join the ARC. We did a shakedown cruise around Scandinavia and to the Shetland Islands. It was fun, and it gave me confidence."

In mastering sailing, creating a safe, comfortable floating home, addressing your fears with logic, and setting a realistic time frame, you establish a sound platform that will allow your experiences to grow in depth and strength. Along the way, you'll have achieved a new level of courage to expand your horizons.

Amanda Swan Neal and her husband, John, conduct hands-on sail-training expeditions aboard Mahina Tiare III, their Hallberg-Rassy HR 46. For more information, visit their website (www.mahina.com).

The New Cruising Paradigm

Aspects of most women's identities—home, friends, family, and career—are difficult to trade for a life of unknowns. In the final installment of this series, the author says that the key is finding balance. "Cruising Connections" From our April 2008 issue

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By Amanda Swan Neale ([More articles by this author](#))



Linda Dawkins has made staying in touch with friends and family a priority while cruising.

Cruising was once considered a full-time endeavor that was expected to last for several years. It would include necessary side trips sailed across many miles of ocean for the single purpose of seeking safety during storm seasons. That's all changed now. A worldwide increase in secure marinas and boatyards at which to safely leave your boat allows cruisers more options. It's now possible to cruise part-time for four to seven months a year, and this allows sailors to make trips home to visit family and friends, to engage in meaningful work that they love, and to take breaks from the boat to travel inland.

Barbara Robertson sails *Red Shoes*, a Hallberg-Rassy 40, and she found a way to successfully combine her work and cruising with her husband. "We cruise six months a year in Europe," she says. "During the sailing off-season, I work as an anesthetist in the Southern Hemisphere, and on our way to and from the boat, we pass through Vancouver, Canada, twice a year in May and October and get to spend a few weeks seeing family and friends.

"To me, full-time cruising lacks routine and rootedness. The constant change makes me feel off balance. It's nice to get back to a daily routine, meet fellow professionals whom I'll see again, and take stock, all against the backdrop of anticipating a return to the boat. As a result, both the cruising and land-based sides of my life seem more fulfilling."

Your Support Network

It's rare to have all your family and friends support your decision to go cruising. Often, they simply can't relate to your dream, or they may feel abandoned by you, especially if you've always been there for them. It'll take time and reassurance before they understand that this is important to you.

"My daughter was extremely emotional about my leaving," says Linda Dawkins (www.svaquila.com), who sails *Aquila*, a Hylas 49. "We're very close friends and talked or saw each other daily. She said that I was her emotional rock and she was afraid she'd fall apart without me near. But at the same time, she wanted me to live my dream. It's been hard, but we talk regularly, and she's joined us on board."

Gathering a supportive network of those who are on a similar track will help you achieve your dreams. How to do it? Visit boat shows, attend seminars, join the Seven Seas Cruising Association, surf the web, subscribe to sailing magazines, chat with people who've cruised, join a sailing club.

Robin Owen (www.sailwhisper.com) sails on *Whisper*, a Hallberg-Rassy 42, and says that many of the books and magazines, especially the technical ones, scared her into thinking about all the things that can go wrong. "But in reality, now that I'm out here, it's not as scary as they made it seem. Sure, things do go wrong, and you need to know what to do, but when you're out here doing it and dealing with whatever comes up, it's far easier than sitting

back in a chair worrying about it."

Your Career

Our personal identity and sense of self-worth can be wrapped up in our work. If you've been a career woman, there's often a long adjustment to the life of a cruiser.

"I got lots of self-esteem from my job," says Owen. "So when I stopped working and went cruising, there was only Duncan, my partner of 15 years. Getting your self-esteem from the person you love doesn't necessarily work. It was a problem for me for the first year. Slowly, those feelings faded.

"Creating a website was an awesome project for me because it's a kind of journal. What I really enjoy is going back and reading about the cool stuff we've done. Now that our cruising kitty is running out, we'll look for work here in New Zealand. I'll probably choose to work in the same software-development field. But I don't want to get re-immersed in the endless rat race."

Many women combine work and cruising, either working while living aboard in a country to which they've sailed, as Owen plans, or continuing to cruise while working.

Sue Churchill of *Moemoea*, a 41-foot Lidgard, used the time at sea to achieve a life goal. "I'm a wildlife biologist specializing in mammal ecology, primarily bats, and I've been able to continue my surveys of bats in some of the places we've cruised," she says. "While in Costa Rica, I tried for several nights to capture a vampire bat as it came in to feed on the ear of a pig. No luck on the vampire bat, but two small bats would visit inside the boat each night to do a sweep around for food. During our Atlantic crossing, I wrote *Australian Bats*, a comprehensive identification guidebook."

Some women, such as Robertson, the anesthetist, balance part-time work with part-time cruising. "I use recruiting agencies to find me temporary jobs," she says. "I've chosen positions in New Zealand and Australia, as they're places we won't be visiting on the boat and it's relatively easy to obtain professional registration and work permits. One of the reasons I continue to work, besides not wanting to give up my career completely, is to be able to help our daughters financially while they're pursuing post-secondary education. When working as a temp, one of the conditions I negotiate is furnished accommodations and a car for the duration of my contract. That way, we don't need to accumulate many 'extras.'"

Home Sweet Home

For many women, moving to a sailboat from a home that's been a special place is a distressing concept. There are several options open to you. All are workable, depending on your finances.

One way to go is to sell your home to finance the boat purchase and the cruising. This is what Nancy Brown, who sails *Askari*, a Shearwater 49, did. "We don't have a house back home," she says. "We gave everything to our kids when we left, as they each have their own families. We had a big family meeting and divided up all our stuff. The kids wrote down what they wanted, then negotiated with each other. The kids are proud that we're out cruising. We feel free."

For Mavis Norman on *Kaien*, a Waterline 444, leasing her house while cruising worked best. "We have our house in West Vancouver rented," she says. "Some people find this a hassle, but we've been lucky with our tenants. It's been nice to know we have a home back there. I see objects at the places we stop while cruising and picture them placed in the house—though I must admit, I now think more about the boat's decor."

For Robertson, downsizing to a condominium that's easily rented and maintained is perfect. "The only real estate we own is a condo at a British Columbia ski resort, and it's presently in a rental pool," she says. "We sold everything else in order to satisfy the nonresident tax laws in Canada. Nonresidents don't pay income tax if they're out of the country for two years. We decided to keep the condo, thinking that we might want to live at Whistler once we return to Canada. But it's also a good investment."

My husband, John, and I know a number of cruisers who own a piece of land, some with a garage, studio, or trailer on it. They all have a long-term goal of building their dream homes on the pieces of property when they finish cruising.

Simplify

Downsizing from house to boat is a process of simplification, and it can become addictive. If you're overwhelmed by your possessions and don't know how to deal with them, read *Making Peace with the Things in Your Life* by Cindy Glovinsky (2002, St. Martin's Press).

Catherine Taylor (svindigo.blogspot.com) sailed with John and me on an expedition in 1999 and has since been working toward realizing the cruising dream on board Indigo, a 42-foot Nauticat. In May 2006, she posted this update on her website: "We've been absorbed in the sorting and packing necessary to dismantle a land-based life. Tomorrow, all of these boxes and bundles go into storage, along with our furniture. A few favorite bits and pieces have been placed with friends and family for safekeeping. Many more of our possessions have been sold or given away. Now we'll be living entirely on Indigo, down to the essentials of life on board. Sometime this weekend, we'll untie the lines and ride the current, swollen by spring runoff, down toward the sea."

Carolyn Thomas, on *Yolo*, a Cape Dory 25D, is currently in the process of moving aboard, but her view of downsizing differs from Catherine's. "I don't care about material stuff too much, but I've still accumulated a lot of it just because I have the room," she says. "I've sold a lot of junk on eBay, and I'm always looking around our place for stuff to sell or give away. I don't want to go cruising with a lot of things rotting away in storage. We don't have kids or pets, and the condo is for sale, so the physical transition will be easy."

Staying in Touch

Modern communication, including e-mail through SSB or amateur radio, portable satellite telephones, and increasing WiFi access, has meant it's never been easier or less expensive to keep in touch or to create a website that allows family and friends to follow your adventures. If you're worried that it'll be difficult to stay in touch, consider this e-mail I received from Linda Dawkins after *Aquila* made a quick stop in St. Martin, in the French West Indies: "We're always in touch with our close circle of family and friends," she writes. "It's been so easy to visit Internet cafés, and many areas have free WiFi all the way out to our boat. Aboard, we monitor our e-mail and make phone calls using Skype. When we're under way, we have a satellite system called Skymate that enables us to send and receive e-mails without requiring an Internet connection. We always seem to be coordinating a future meeting with somebody somewhere, and we love that."

"I have an enormous support network and receive dozens of messages each month on my website with words of encouragement and praise. Many women tell me that I'm their role model, and the guys want to know how to meet a girl like me—one who wants to sail full-time!"

It is just such concerns as these that surface regularly during my cruising seminars for women. To talk about these questions with like-minded women offers on occasion for clarity and fresh perspective; you'll be better prepared for the decisions and actions you'll make about cruising. I've seen so many women step out of their old lives and into a rewarding new life of cruising—a life they originally viewed as nothing more than a black abyss. Be open. Ask questions. Think outside the box. There are no hard-and-fast cruising rules, so create your own. Only you can answer the question, "Is the cruising life right for me?"

Amanda Swan Neal and her husband, John, conduct hands-on sail-training expeditions aboard their HR 46. For more information, visit their website (www.mahina.com).