

A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE GREAT LOOP VOYAGE by Doris Prichard



For years we've lived and boated on the Tennessee River, and when we vacation...it's usually somewhere by the water. Wayne has always loved boats and his business was boat related. It came as a logical progression for us to want to spend a year traveling on the Great Loop.

We've talked about it for years, but finally decided to start actively planning the trip when I retired. We subscribed to magazines like PassageMaker, Southern Boating, and Sea Magazine to start our learning process. We traveled to boat shows and attended a Trawler Fest. Trawler Fests, sponsored by PassageMaker Magazine, are a combination boat show and learning opportunity with classes on topics of interest to cruising boaters. These events were very helpful to us and gave us an opportunity to talk with other boaters who were already out there cruising.



We finally bought our boat, Segue, in 2003. ("Segue" for our transition from work to retirement and from land to water.) The boat is a 43 foot 1984 Californian cockpit motor yacht. We traveled to Florida and chartered a boat before buying so that we'd know what we wanted. That was one of the most useful things we did to help us select a boat. We came away looking for a queen size bed (or larger), a covered deck for rainy days, and a galley that was separate from the living area.

We refurbished the boat over the next four years and during that time started researching the Great Loop. We joined the America's Great Loop Cruisers Assn. (www.greatloop.org) and in addition to attending a couple of their meetings we started monitoring email discussion lists sponsored by that group and other cruising boater groups.

Once we were both retired, we knew it was time to make our move. During the months leading up to our October 2007 departure we fine tuned the boat, took a navigation class from the Knoxville Power Squadron, gathered supplies, planned our route, found a house sitter, forwarded our mail....Well, we were going away for a year and there was a lot to take care of! Friends asked why we weren't going to "try it out" first for a couple of months to see how we liked life on the

water. We decided it was just as much trouble to close up house for a couple of months as it was for a couple of years...and we *were* determined to do the Loop! We set a departure date and took off in mid-October, looking forward to the show of fall color as we made our way down the Tennessee River.

Our exuberance was dampened one day into the trip when the fuel tank started leaking. It would have to be replaced, and our trip was going to have to wait a couple of months until the boatyard could fit us into their work plan. We just couldn't bear the thought of going back to our house and undoing every plan we'd set in place for the year, so we quietly made our way back to Knoxville, got our car, and set out on a road trip to visit some of the places we planned to see by water. One month later we went home for Thanksgiving so we could monitor the repair process daily.

Mid-December we struck out again on the Great Loop. Yes, the fall color was gone...and the weather as we made our way to the Gulf was rainy and cold...but we were on our way! Fortunately the cold weather still allowed some spectacular views.



Traveling with us on our trip was our 2-yr-old miniature schnauzer, Lucy. Our planning for the Loop, then, included plans for Lucy's safety and comfort, too.



Lucy's a reluctant swimmer so we bought her a life jacket with a "handle" on top to make getting her on and off the boat easier. Our vet was very enthusiastic about the trip and worked up a first aid kit for Lucy that included an antibiotic, ear drops, antihistamine, motion sickness remedy, and other medications she thought might come in handy. Lucy's vaccinations were all updated, and (knowing we would be going into Canada) we got a certificate signed to that effect.



I had some concerns about the trip initially, I'll admit. Wayne and I have been married for 40 years. (In fact, we spent our 40th year together making this trip!) Wayne retired in April, and I had been retired for several years. In all of our years together we had never spent even a month together 24/7...not that that's unusual for a couple who both have careers. Anyway, I just wondered whether we would end up driving each other crazy after a few months.

Wayne wasn't concerned. And in retrospect, it was not a problem. There were two things we did to make it easier on each other. First, we bought the "marriage savers"...the headphones that allow the captain and crew to communicate without shouting as you are docking. Second, and this was Wayne's idea, we agreed to "be nice to each other." Sounds simple, but it worked. Oh, there were times when an urgency would creep into our voices as we surveyed a new problem. But the words, "Let's be nice to each other" would make us realize we were unintentionally working up to more than a hearty discussion! All told, it was a wonderful year spent together, and we made some great memories.

Another concern I had was that I would get bored. I brought books (I'd say between us we probably had close to 50 or more), my watercolor paints and a variety of papers, several needlework projects, some quilting, my portable sewing machine...Need I go on?

Looking back on it, that is the craziest thing I've ever worried about! I think it stems from the idea we had that one of us would be piloting the boat...while the other would be eating bon-bons and reading on the back deck. Well, that's not how it was for us. Most days found us both sitting up on the bridge, one steering the boat and watching the electronic charts while the other kept up with the paper charts. We both liked the view from the bridge, and we just felt better most times having four eyes on the course.

Our Great Loop trip took us from Ft. Loudon Lake, Knoxville, TN, to Mobile, Key West, up the east coast to NY City, then to Canada including Montreal, Ottawa, Georgian Bay, the North Channel of Lake Huron, then south across Lake Michigan to Chicago, and down a

system of six rivers back to Knoxville. It was a year long journey of 6,800 miles, 128 locks and 4400 gallons of diesel fuel.



Leaving Key West via Hawk Channel in the Atlantic

The trip was everything we thought it would be...and more. There were many highlights... but we both agree we'll never forget our emotional high when coming into New York harbor...with the Statue of Liberty on one side and the Manhattan skyline on the other.



We learned so much on this trip.

- At first we thought one person could leisurely spend time leisurely reading on deck while the other was handling the boat. Quickly we discovered that piloting was usually a two person job.
- After encountering rough water a couple of times, we learned to stay at the dock when the weather was bad.
- New friends made in strange places are special...as are old friends and family supporting you and sharing the experience.

But the thing we came to realize as we traveled the Hudson River, Lake Champlain, and other well-known cruising destinations, is that we live in one of the most beautiful bodies of water on the Loop...the Tennessee River.

We are by no means the first to complete the Loop. We just want others to know, those who've dreamed about doing this sort of trip, that there are organizations and individuals out there to help you plan and execute the journey. Your plan can be a personal one...you can vary the route, the time and the expense. You can also decide when you want to travel with a group of boats or when by yourself. No matter your method, it really *can* be "the trip of a lifetime."

You can read more about our travels at WWW.SEGUEVOYAGE.COM and our business website WWW.CRUISERMARINE.COM