



All You Need is LOVE

By Alan Platt

‘There is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.’

"Ratty" the water rat in *The Wind in The Willows*.



Senad Srvaka

Ah, to cruise paradise on your own yacht! The stuff of dreams, the sport of the rich? Well, yes and no. Surprisingly, most people who do this are not living rich at all. They're just living their dreams.

Many of the boats you see out there bobbing at anchor or drifting across the horizon as you sigh with envy are not somebody's fancy toy. They're often somebody's home, and an inexpensive one at that.

Hard on the heels of December's King's

Cup Regatta, a splashy collection of seagoing Ferraris guaranteed to elicit sighs all around, let us introduce you to an entirely different style of sailor, a class of adventurer far more romantic to our jaded eyes. These are the navigators of modest means, people who, like yourself perhaps, dreamed of the vagabond life on the ocean waves, and with money a constant concern, still found a way to do it anyway. These are not ordinary people, far from it. But we don't have to envy their money. We simply salute their spirit.

On three quite modest yachts, three quite amazing stories are currently at anchor off Phuket, waiting for the trade winds to nudge them on to the next chapter in their unlikely adventures. And they're only three of many. They sailed to paradise on a yacht on a budget. And here's how they all... just *did* it.

Roll the Dice

Senad is a cinematographer from Bosnia, Tuzla to be precise, a coal-mining city in a landlocked country. But as a boy, his head was full of far-flung adventure. "Other kids played. I read." *Treasure Island*, *Around the*

World in 80 Days, all the good stuff. Holidays were spent on the lovely Croatian coast ogling sailboats and dreaming. Then war came - the notorious ethnic cleansing of the Bosnians by the Serbs - and Senad was busy reporting it for TV with his video camera. Getting sick of being shot at, he wound up in Paris, got married and became settled. "I was a bureaucrat. I shuffled paper for years." But those yachts were still on his mind, along with the maps and the faraway places with the sweet-sounding names. A catastrophe came to his rescue. He was laid off and divorced. "Just like that, I lost my job, my wife and my home." But he got a chunk of change from the severance and the settlement, and he knew exactly what he had to do with it.

"I knew that this was the moment. If I did not take it, the chance may never come again." He had never set foot on a yacht, didn't even know if he would throw up. But he had been researching the kind of sailboats you can live aboard, ocean cruisers, and after only five days of sailing instruction, he bought one, a 29' Dufour in a little Mediterranean port. He changed her name to *Alea*, remembering his



reading. Julius Caesar, as he crossed the Rubicon and marched on Rome, famously declared, "*Alea iacta est.*" The die is cast. You see, that's what it takes to cruise paradise on a budget. Not money. Desire. You just gotta throw those dice, Julius baby.

Alea is a 9-metre sloop, seaworthy but far from fancy, 29-seagoing-feet of nothing very special, no fancy equipment or even a satellite phone, but she was what he could afford if his nest egg was going to last. He spent the next few years learning her ins and outs up and down the Med and the Adriatic, with friends, not venturing too far, but becoming a good sailor in the process and living the dream aboard his own yacht. He wound up sailing the beautiful Turkish coast. "I sailed into Istanbul. I stuck my nose into the Black Sea just to see if it was black - it wasn't - and I turned around. But I'd officially been to Asia." It was a good omen.

The cash stash was starting to look iffy. He couldn't last much longer in the Med. But tootling around Turkey were several sailors returning from the Indian Ocean, with talk of

its beauty, its good winds, and more important to Senad, its affordability.

He started cautiously down the Red Sea with a passenger more for company than for help (he was pretty useless), joined a sail-cruiser rally in Sudan, left it in Oman and nosed out into the big ocean and some amazing sights. "You really need a companion

His longest haul was from the Maldives to Phuket, 1,600 miles, basically doing it single-handed.

onboard when you see some things. Just to make sure they really happened." Like what, for instance? "Like a fish the size of a car shooting thirty feet into the air and crashing back into the water."

And is the Indian Ocean as safe as they say? "Yes. Except for a little piracy off Yemen." And what would a *little* piracy look like? "Guys in these massive, empty speedboats going 70mph sometimes steal your stuff: your watch, your camera, that's all. They don't want your

boat. They don't hurt you. They're basically just bored."

And why are they doing 70 in an empty speeder in the middle of nowhere? "Smuggling. And the boat isn't quite empty. Somewhere on board there's a matchbox worth several million dollars." What's in it? "Diamonds."

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And as to the future, on his next big haul, back to the Maldives he really will be alone, without a satellite phone, putting together his new career as a nature photographer to keep that nest egg warm and stay, literally, afloat. He has the qualifications. "I was trained to shoot well and make a picture look good. And I intend to shoot in certain remote places where nobody has shot before." He will put it into three books, one in English, one in French and one in Serbo-Croat. That should keep him busy while waiting for leaping fish the size of Hondas.



Miranda and her pet parrot, Pau.

Miranda.

Shakespeare's most adorable heroine is the sweet-natured beauty of *The Tempest*, a girl who grew up on a remote island, depending for her education on what her father Prospero taught her. Fortunately, he was a cool guy, Miranda grew up to be an angel.

At anchor off the beach at Ao Chalong is the good ship *Senoiki*, a two-masted Formosa ketch, waiting for the warm winds of the sailing season to push her gently to the Maldives. She's not so sleek, but roomy and was solidly built in Taiwan. On board is the French family of a modern day Miranda, the lovely sixteen-year-old Morgane and her parents Cathy and Yann. Morgane grew up at sea.

Senoiki is the Japanese word for "breath of life", a sweet way of describing the wind. She has a jaunty, slightly piratical look about her, with a carved wooden rail around her square galleon-style stern, a parrot named *Pau* from Senegal, who does a hilarious impression of a mobile phone, and a skipper with the full Monty of tattoos and earrings. This is Dad, the tall tan Yann.

Mom is Cathy, a glamorous blonde formerly in the biz of fancy Parisian hairstyling - Jean-Louis David, no less - before chucking it all up for a life of adventure with the whole world as a home. Every morning for the last six years, storms permitting, Cathy has done her Prospero act, parenting Morgane through her official French school correspondence course. Once a week the exercises are sent off into the ether to France for grading. As a result, Morgane is enviably educated, articulate and bilingual and, more to the point, a delight. She's a poster child for home schooling, Cathy-style. And, oh the stories she will have to tell

her own children.

This family history is one hell of a tale. Yann was a rising young cook, just reaching the pinnacle of *chef de cuisine* at a very grand Parisian restaurant when it hit him, "this sucks." Around the same time, Cathy, surrounded by the rich and vain in Paris, reached the same conclusion. Yann went to Corsica to start a little cooking school. Cathy arrived for a summer break. Ka-boom!

From the day they met, they have seldom lived in a house. First, it was a caravan-trailer

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pulled by a little truck. They followed the music festivals around Europe, setting up a stall to cook for the kids and musicians (already, what a life!). But when Morgane arrived and the trailer got a bit tight, they traded it for a double-decker bus they found in Glasgow. They ripped out the seats, built a two-storey mobile home and set off again to follow the music, make a little money and live the life. But, like Senad, Cathy had always dreamed of a boat. So, just like the Bosnian and with the same zero experience, they bought a little cruising sloop, *Cybelle*, and learned to sail her on a lake near Marseilles, before setting off for Corsica and *la vie en bleu*, the life aquatic.

To arrive here in Phuket, their trip has strung together a series of faraway places that

sounds like one long fantasy. Morocco-Senegal-Cape Verde-Brazil-Guyana-Suriname-Venezuela-Curacao-Panama-Costa Rica-Galapagos-the Marquesas-Tahiti-Moure-Bora Bora-Fiji-Numea-Bali-Borneo-Singapore-Lankawi-Phuket.

Nice work, if you can get it. And you get it with gumption, not money.

In Brazil, the intrepid family was down to its last US\$50. So they sailed to Kourou in French Guyana, where the Ariane rockets are blasted into orbit, and rolled up their sleeves.

Yann worked as a motor mechanic, a key skill on a boat when you *really* need it. Cathy got into emergency medicine, learning another crucial component for a life far from help. And they got to see a night rocket launch, "The most incredible thing I saw in my entire life."

In the Marquesas, broke again, they made jewellery from wild-boar tusks, and candles from bamboo, loading up on loot every time a cruise ship docked, getting creative to finance the dream.

In Senegal, they acquired *Pau* the parrot, in Curacao *Fundy* a little white dog and, with the family now complete, they traded little *Cybelle* for the grander *Senoika* in Costa Rica. And that's how it has remained.

It hasn't all been smooth sailing. They have had their own tempests; a vicious *mistral* in the Med and a storm they barely survived on leaving Borneo, which "broke almost everything" before they limped into Singapore to stick everything back together.

And after all the sights, from rocket launches to Fijians with full-face tattoos, all three agree that Thailand is the best place so far and that if they ever settle down, this will be it.



Yan, pooch, Miranda & Cathy: one happy sailing family.

And what did they miss most in these six years? "Cheeeese!!!" they yell, "...and baguettes, and wine, and..." Ah, the fabulous French, they've always got the right priorities.

But later, privately, I ask Morgane what she herself missed most on this long and winding voyage from little girl to lovely teenager. "A boyfriend," she said sweetly. And now she has one; a very fortunate Thai boy, sweet-natured and for a blonde French girl, very exotic.

"O wonder!" said Miranda. "How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in't!"

Working Class Heroes

In a bar on the water's edge we met Gerd and Lottie, two deeply tanned old salts, a very jolly couple in their fifties, married for twenty-five years, who laugh a lot and seem to enjoy each other's company immensely. That would be pretty much essential in their case. They have spent the last ten years alone together on a little boat that has brought them here by lazy stages from f-f-freezing Europe, via one tropical paradise after another.

Like Senad, they are from a landlocked country, Austria, hardly the first name that occurs to one when thinking about coral lagoons. They too had dreams of paradise and they too were strapped for cash. Gerd was a pipe fitter; Lotte did various so-so jobs, not a bad row to hoe in the worker-friendly New Europe. But any job, even glamorous ones like Yann's and Cathy's, pretty much sucks when you've been bitten by the bug. And imagination and desire are equal opportunity biters.

Not everybody is obvious material for the grand gesture, chucking it all up and rolling those dice. But people are people. Dreams are dreams. And gumption is its own reward.

"We had a solid Austrian education with OK English, so were not afraid to go out there and communicate," said Gerd. Lotte added the one common thread among all three travellers' tales, "We read adventure stories when we were children. So, a crazy life in wild places seemed pretty normal to us. But, you know, even just watching TV you see things that make you say, 'Screw this. Let's just go!'"

So they went! With few savings and after a few lessons from a mate with a sailboat in Sicily, they lucked into *Lucilia*, a 32' Catalina that an American needed to sell fast, so they took more of a plunge than they could really afford, and by the time they had learned the ropes up and down the Italian coast, they had blown the entire budget and had to go home again and work. And basically that's their story. Over and over and over again. Earn money, sail away on *Lucilia*, run out of money, park the boat where she is, fly home, work, earn money, rejoin *Lucilia*, sail on. They love this life. And love will find a way. Love, not money, will get you to Paradise.

Gert and Lottie's lovely life is possible because they chose, as John Burdett said, quality of life over standard of living. Luckily, the working part is a fraction of the sailing part. For a solid year of glorious goofing-off from

Madagascar to Malaysia, via every pretty port and coral lagoon in the Indian Ocean, they have to put in a solid four months in Austria as Gerd the fitter and Lottie the waitress, or the saleslady, or the whatever. And every evening when they get home tired, they just pour themselves a beer and reminisce about Zanzibar, Madagascar, Lamu, Reunion, Mauritius, the Seychelles, the Maldives, the Andaman Sea and dear old Phuket.

So, not only is this way of life possible on a budget, but as Senad explained to us, the

Tropics, those latitudes with the good attitudes, each side of the equator, actually help sailors along

with steady trade winds and predictable weather. It's as if the tropics want you here. For instance, on the long haul between Galapagos and the Marquesas, Yann and Cathy literally never touched a rope for 16 of the 20 days. The parrot did more work. And our lovely Indian Ocean is the safest in the world for a sailor; the gentlest, the least piratical (except off Yemen), the most predictable, and the cheapest.

In January, Senad, Cathy, Yann, Morgane, Lottie and Gerd will all head west on the deep blue run to the Maldives, pushed by a warm wind. And the money thing? Love will find a way. 

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