

Vacations on the water

2-27-23

I've been on two vacations in my life actually spent on boats. The first was in the late 50's with my Mariner Girl Scout troop when we traveled to Nova Scotia to sail on a 52' two masted schooner. It was a wonderful group of girls, all smart, adventuresome, musical and kind. Everyone was always willing to pitch in and help with whatever task was presented. In addition to terrific scouts, our leader was very special in that she knew how to support us from behind. By that I mean that she empowered us to act, but lay the ground work for all of our adventures, be it hiking up mountains in the Adirondacks, river canoeing in the spring, or, in this case, traveling to Canada, by doing the behind the scenes planning.

We sailed on a traditional schooner - no fancy motor-powered devices to lift the sails or the anchor as they have now. There was a captain in charge and he trained us to be the crew. What fun lifting the sails and navigating the path through the water, or diving over the side to swim in the ocean before climbing up again on the other side of the boat. We stopped at many interesting ports such as Peggy's Cove, Halifax, a small spot called Nor'west Cove where we couldn't understand each other's English. In spite of the language barrier, they somehow taught us how to make fish netting. My favorite port was Lunenburg. We sailed into the harbor under full sail, including the square topsail. The captain was enjoying showing off and it must have been quite a sight. In Lunenburg we met with all of the woodworkers, sail makers and rope makers who were recreating the Bounty for the movie of the early '60's.

All during our trip, the weather was perfect because Nova Scotia was in the middle of a drought. One kind family even gave us the last of the water from their well. “The dew will replenish the well overnight” they claimed.

On to the second event. When I turned 75, my daughter Casey and one of her friends (whose mother was also turning 75) organized a trip to Croatia, again on a sail boat and again with a compatible, all-female group. In this case it was a modern boat staffed by the captain and a helper who prepared our breakfast and lunch and kept the boat, especially the galley, in ship shape. Most of the gals who came with us were Alaskans except for my two daughter-in-laws, Layla and Evelyn, who we invited to join us. We filled the boat with our group.

We boarded the boat in Split which is on the west coast of Croatia on the Adriatic Sea, and visited multiple islands in the vicinity, docking each evening at a different island for dinner and the night. Every morning we ate an excellent breakfast of locally sold produce as our helper would get up early, shop, and prepare our breakfast. She would also buy the fixings for our lunch. We came to really love Croatian food, created fresh and just for us. What luxury!

The history of these islands is long and fascinating. They were occupied by the Romans long before the current era and their ruins were still there to see. In later years, the islands were in danger of being raided by pirates. You have to understand that these are very rough, steep and high islands for the most part. The people would protect themselves from the pirates by making small homesteads or settlements inland, away from the steep edges, so that they could not be spotted from the sea below. The men who fished for a living would

climb down the steep trails to their boats in the morning while their families farmed and raised stock in the relative safety above.

During WWII, the island of Vis had a small air strip build on the relatively level top of the island among the farm fields. For bombers coming from the fight, it was a possible refuge if their plane was damaged or running low on fuel and could not make it back to England. Sadly, many did not make even that, but it also saved the lives of those lucky enough to find a safe landing there. There is a memorial set next to one of the hill top roads to those pilots and a reunion has been held periodically since the end of the war when pilots return there from England. Few are left now, but the islanders still remember.

Vis is also an island where donkeys are celebrated. Why? There are two towns on the island, one on each side. In years past, the only way to go from one to the other was by boat. Someone knew that donkeys were reported to be able to find their way home by the most direct path. So they took donkeys from one town to the other and let them go. Each had a sack, probably with sand, with a small hole in it which left a trail ala Hansel and Gretel. They build a road following that path which is still used to this day. We ate dinner at the top of Vis and followed that winding road down in the dark, high above the harbor. What a view. Everyone thanked the donkeys.

One day the captain took us to an out of the way cove where there seemed to be only one person in the whole area. We were able to take a swim, climbing or jumping off of the boat. I must admit that I only got my feet wet, but the younger members of the group all had a wonderful swim. Our captain was wonderful. He knew all of the

tucked away places, be it swimming holes or great, off the beaten path restaurants.

The boat was a sailing craft but we generally used the motor. On one windy afternoon we cut off the motor and used the sail. I was thrilled as we heeled over before the breeze, but my fearless daughter, who had apparently never sailed before, was terrified. I'm sure she was afraid that the boat would turn over or that she would slide out into the water. It probably was not the best first sailing experience. That is best done on a little boat like a sailfish or a very large boat that actually stays upright.

When this leg of our vacation ended, everyone headed home to the USA except Layla, Casey and me. We headed off to Rome to meet Jim Speed and spent a few days with him, starting in a very hot Rome and then going up to his place outside of Florence. We did get down to Florence one day to tour and buy earrings at Casey's favorite little shop. All together, I can't imagine every topping this vacation.