

THE RELUCTANT MATE

Turning Others On to Your Liveaboard Dreams



Sharon & Steve Reed worked through different views of life together and now live happily aboard s/v Poet's Place.

by Sharon Reed

“Boy, would I love to do what you guys are doing, but I could never get my partner to agree.” This was a comment I was to hear many times once I moved aboard and my husband and I started planning our off-shore cruise. The line was so familiar, in fact, I got so I could finish their sentences at the “but . . .”

These were people who wished their partners would agree to live aboard and sail the world, or even just go boating with them. Usually, the grief was bemoaned among men, who complained about the adventure-less spirit their female partners. But sometimes it was the other way around; the women also voiced their dismay that they couldn't find men who wanted to sail, live on a boat or venture off-shore. All of these lop-sided unions got me wondering why someone would resist the temptation to join their partner's quest for boating adventures. Sailing and boating are so much fun!

And then I remembered . . . not so many years ago, I informed my sailing dreamer of a husband that I would *never* live on a boat, much less sell my business and just take off and cruise around the world. But here I am living aboard, business sold, and headed off across the globe. So now I wonder, What was it that made me change my mind, and what can others do to help their partners become as enthusiastic as I now am?

First of all, you can't change anyone, so don't even try. I certainly wasn't going to change my mind and live in a space the size of a walk-in closet. No sir,

not me. But I do like romantic vacations and the water. My husband knows this and took me on a sailing trip, which turned out to be an idyllic weekend in the San Juans. That was the beginning. He's also very patient, and that was key to the whole process. I am proof that people do change.

But you can't change them; you can only change yourself.

Now, I don't want to sound like some sort of parlor psychologist, but if you really want your reluctant partner to enjoy boating and maybe even start dreaming of sailing off-shore, you may have to change your outlook and perhaps acquire some new skills — such as patience. With maximum patience and minimum yelling, you may also see changes in your partner. Let me say it again: patience. For me, that was the most important thing.

I had my own ideas about why people may be reluctant boaters, but I wondered what others, especially women who were already involved in boating,

would say. So I put together a survey and handed it out to women already involved in boating. The response was overwhelming. Many of these boating women were once reluctant partners themselves and, consequently, had some great ideas for helping the reluctant partner get interested in boating. I really enjoyed the honesty of their comments. They even corrected my spelling. If you have a reluctant partner, you may want to pay close attention to the answers from this survey.

• **How did you get interested in boating?**

75 percent of the women surveyed became interested through their partner; 15 percent had been boating since they were young, with families and relatives; and 10 percent learned on their own.

• **If you own a boat, did you help pick it out?**

85 percent said yes.

• **Are you included in decision-making on purchases for the boat?**

75 percent said yes. Most said it helped them feel involved to be a part



Steve shows off the day's catch — dinner.

of the decision. They also said it really helped if they could make the boat comfortable and homey. Interior accommodation and decoration was important to them.

• **Is boating something you and your partner do together?**

90 percent of the women answered yes. They stated they were glad it wasn't just "his" thing, but something they did together or as a family. Some stated they didn't like to race but did like to

cruise. And there was one who said, "Partner? I have a life by myself, thank you."

• **Was boating your idea or your partner's?**

Of the couples surveyed, 70 percent said boating was their partner's idea, while 25 percent said it was both.

• **Do you enjoy boating?**

Unanimous — it was yes in every case.

• **What is the best part about boating for you?**

Many said getting away from it all was the best part. "Something we do as a family" was also mentioned several times. Several said it was exciting and challenging, and a few even said it

was romantic. Almost every woman stated they enjoyed learning new skills. The fact that so many of them enjoy learning new skills is why it's important for the partner to encourage the woman boater to learn every aspect of sailing. The women in the survey urged, "Explain to her what she doesn't understand, have patience and *don't yell!*" Almost all the women wrote, "Don't yell" as the number-one advice to men.



Hauling groceries in Mazatlan.



Sharon paints a three-part nested rowing dinghy.

• **How has boating affected your relationship?**

57 percent said it's slightly improved, 15 percent said it's better than ever, and 28 percent said "no effect."

One woman said it was difficult because it is his boat, but their communication has improved.

• **Do you find boating expensive?**

90 percent of the women agreed that it was expensive, but that it was worth it and no more expensive than any other hobby.

• **If you were to lose your partner, would you still go boating?**

Even though most of the women said boating was their partner's idea, almost all of them said yes, they would continue to boat. In fact, only 5 percent said no. (It would appear that all these ladies fell in love with the boating life.)

• **What would your advice be to non-boating women who may be interested?**

"Try to not be afraid."

"Join a group or club, or try a women's club."

"Boat with other women; they are less competitive and better teachers."

"Take lessons, crew on other boats, and dress warmly."

"Women are just as capable as men — you can do it."

"Go ashore for dinner and shopping; don't just stay on the boat."

• **What would be your advice to men who would like to get their partner interested in boating?**

"Involve them and include them."

"Don't yell."

"Don't force her if conditions are bad. Introduce her to sailing in good



Poet's Place rests in the placid waters of Honeymoon Cove in the Sea of Cortez.

conditions, cruise to the San Juans, or find another nice getaway spot. Make it romantic."

"Instead of just going out for a sail, combine it with stopping at a port, spending the night and going out to dinner and shopping."

"Make your mate part of the decision-making process."

"Show, don't tell."

"Treat her as a partner, not a galley slave."

And the one that sums it up best: "The only reason I can think of that a woman wouldn't love boating would be because *he's* not fun on the boat."

Of course, that could work both ways. Some respondents noted that the survey was biased because it assumed that men always buy the boats and make the decisions, and that the reluctant mate is a woman. There are, of course, instances where the women are owners and captains of their boats. And sure enough, those few cases reported that men can be reluctant partners, too.

After reading through the surveys, I was convinced that the "reluctant partner" was not just a boating issue, but a relationship issue. If the couples had a good relationship, then they could usually work through the boating issue. One woman said she and her husband have an agreement that she has 51 percent of the vote for interior decisions and he has 51 percent of the vote for the exterior. That's how they compromise. Another woman, who said she is not crazy about sailing, suggested spending some weekends sailing and some doing what

she wants to do. You never know, eventually what she wants to do may be sailing.

So men — and women, too — if you have a reluctant partner, you may want to try some of these suggestions. It may mean making some changes and trying some new skills yourself, but it may be well worth it if you really want your partner to be your sailing mate. If you include them, involve them and encourage them, with a little patience they may fall in love again — with boating and with the captain! I know because I was once that reluctant mate.

Sharon Reed is a writer and poet who lives aboard with her husband, Steve Hendricks. Their home port is Everett Marina near Seattle, Washington. Sharon sent this story from Tenacatita, Mexico, where she swam with the dolphins in 83-degree water — there's a good way to entice your reluctant mate! Having cruised Mexico for over a year, Sharon and Steve will next head for Central America and the South Pacific aboard *Poet's Place*, their 37' sailboat and home. They can be reached at <KC7KAW@winlink.org>.