

WHAT ABOUT ALL THIS STUFF?



Lisa Odaffer aboard Blue Heaven, with some of her “stuff.”

By Lisa Odaffer

I was nine months pregnant when we closed the sale on *Blue Heaven* and prepared to move aboard. Jay and Alex had been living on a 37' Hunter for three years. I had been living in a two-bedroom apartment for almost five years. They had moved in with me after the wedding with the understanding that we would move back onto the water as soon as we found “the right boat.”

So, after a lifetime on land, I faced that famous liveaboard question: “Where on earth am I going to put *all this stuff?*”

The answer is simple, really: Not on the boat. You can't keep it all. Say it

out loud: “I can't keep it all, and I don't need it all, anyway.” Accept that, and you've won half the battle.

Realistically, it took me eight hours a day, five days a week, for about a month to get everything I wanted to

keep stored in the boat and to give everything else away. Like so many other things, the decisions about what to get rid of and what to find room for are personal ones, but here are some things for you to consider:

No Glass

First, get rid of everything that's made of glass. Imagine dealing with shards of a broken glass underfoot while you are underway. Yikes!

I replaced all of my glassware with sturdy plastic. Look for this plasticware in the summer when department stores put their patio collections on display. You can also get good-quality plastic stemware from most boating stores and catalogues, but these items tend to be more expensive. While you are at it, cut down from 30 drinking glasses to just enough for the family plus two or four extra. If you plan to have more company than that, buy disposable glasses.

Our stoneware dishes (12 place settings) went to Goodwill. The previous owner of *Blue Heaven* had left plastic plates and bowls with little rubber feet on board, but these eventually wore out. No matter how expensive they are, plastic dishes end up discolored and scratched from use. I've been far happier since I tossed them out and bought Corell dishes. These are glass, but are highly resistant to breakage, and because they are so thin, they store in half the space.

I gave a pretty glass clock to my mother-in-law, my lava lamp to my sister, and I packed up all my nice china and crystal and stored them in my dad's garage.

Cookware

Before I had children, one of my favorite hobbies was cooking. One entire cupboard in my kitchen was devoted to my collection of cookbooks. I also had every kitchen gadget under the sun. There was a deep fat fryer, a toaster oven, a microwave, a waffle iron, a toaster, a popcorn air popper, an electric frying pan, a crock-pot, a meat slicer, a french-fry cutter, a food processor, a blender, a citrus juicer, an electric can opener, a counter-top mixer, an electric potato baker, an electric sandwich griller . . . well, you get the picture.

I thought long and hard about what to keep and what to give away. Although we would be living in a marina, we planned to go cruising eventually. I would never have enough electricity to run such appliances while we were on the hook. Besides, my new kitchen was

miniscule in comparison to my old one. Where would I put it all? They had to go.

I started with my collection of knives. If you think about it, a couple of good knives, a grater and a peeler can pretty much do everything a food processor and french-fry cutter can. I got rid of the counter-top blender (which was glass, anyway) and bought one of those hand-held gadgets that you can stick down into your own container. The deep fat fryer, toaster oven, popcorn popper, electric frying pan, and crock-pot could all be replaced by the stove-top and a few pots and pans.

Do you know how people made toast before toasters were invented? Right! They toasted the bread in a frying pan! Goodbye, toaster. A manual can opener that fits neatly in the drawer with the knives replaced the electric model. The counter-top mixer was replaced by a whisk and a wooden spoon. I wouldn't get rid of both the microwave and the toaster oven unless your galley has an oven. There is nothing nicer than blueberry muffins in the morning when you've spent the night in a secluded anchorage.

Wardrobe

The first step to having a decent wardrobe while living aboard is to buy a boat with lots of locker space. Remember, your college dorm had more closet space than the most spacious boat!

The next step is to commit to doing laundry at least once a week. I know, I know — we'd all rather go shopping for new clothes than do the wash. But there is no way that this is going to work on a boat.

I know you've spent a lifetime collecting them, but you don't need 30 T-shirts. Take five or six at the most and give the rest away. (However, if you are going to cruise to Third World countries, save them in a plastic bag on another part of the boat to use as gifts or to trade with the locals.) Do the same with the rest of your casual clothes. Keep only enough to wear between washings. You don't need more than a week's worth of shorts, jeans and casual shirts.

Keep your boat shoes, a pair of sandals and one pair of nice shoes for dressing up. Shoes have the worst time

adjusting to boat life. They absorb moisture from your feet as you walk in them during the day, then, when you put them away in some nice, dark locker, they turn into little mildew farms. The only way to stop this from happening is to wear them regularly.

The same thing goes for purses and belts. They take up too much space and are likely to be destroyed by mildew before you get around to using them. Keep the purse you are using now and one pretty pocketbook for going out. Toss the rest of them. When you need a new one — go buy it!

Seasonal clothing is another problem. I've known women who kept their off-season clothing in boxes in the trunk of their car. Or, rather than keeping a totally separate wardrobe, you can store a week's worth of sweaters and sweatshirts to layer over your summer clothes when the weather is cold. My favorite solution to this problem is to "sail south 'til the butter melts," where you won't need those pesky sweaters anymore. Good riddance to them!

Business Clothes

Professional women have a special problem. How do you store and maintain a business-class wardrobe? Here are a few ideas that I have seen women use:

Buy a van. Really. If you are working full time, you aren't going cruising anytime soon. Get yourself a respectable mini-van, pull out the rear seat, and hang up a closet rod. Buy some plastic bins to store clothes that don't need to be on hangers. Try to get something with tinted windows (or no windows), so people can't tell what you've got inside. A word of caution: If this isn't going to be your major source of transportation, you still need to move the thing once in a while. Marina managers don't like vehicles that become permanent fixtures in their parking lots.

I have seen similar ideas that included a storage unit, renting a bedroom from an empty-

nester friend, or just borrowing the corner of a sibling's garage. None of them particularly appeal to me, though. If I had to do it, I would cut down even farther on my casual wardrobe and fill the locker space with a couple of suits and some extra skirts and blouses that

can be mixed and matched. Plus, a good collection of jewelry, scarves, etc., can make the white blouse and black skirt you wore last week seem like a whole new outfit.

Hall Closets

If you are anything like me, that old running gag in the *Fibber McGee & Molly* radio show that has Fibber opening the hall closet only to be buried in its contents is uncomfortably familiar.

Let's start with the easy stuff. Keep only enough towels for one week's use. Throw the extras away. When the ones you have wear out, buy more. The same goes for sheets. One sheet per bed, period. OK, OK, you can keep one extra for an emergency, but the rest have got to go. Just tell yourself that you will wash them and remake the beds on the same day.

Blankets are more tricky. You use them for only part of the year, so you have to store them somewhere half of the time. Storing them in exterior lockers (those touching the hull) will encourage mildew, so choose an interior locker if any are available. Another way to save storage space is to spread the blankets under the fitted sheets when you make the beds. Dampness under the mattresses may still cause mildew around the edges, so be sure you air them out once in a while.

Holiday decorations are another closet item that I didn't have the heart to eliminate entirely. I bought a couple of those flat, under-the-bed type Rubbermaid containers and stored my favorites in the space underneath the bed in my room. Getting under there is a chore, so

don't put anything down there that you want to get at more than a couple of times a year. It's also damp, so stick to things that won't be attacked by the moisture.

Also take extra care to situate things so that they won't fall against whatever mechanical boat workings are down there. I have the rudder post, the auto pilot and the engine exhaust pipe to work around. If you're not sure what all the stuff is under there, ask someone. Don't wait until you are at sea to discover that your autopilot has stopped working because it's gotten all tangled up in the Christmas lights!

The Six-Month Rule

What about all those things you have carefully carried around for years, but rarely, if ever, use? I'm talking about the back massager Aunt Jean bought you for Christmas five years ago. Your card table and folding chairs. That gorgeous party dress that will fit perfectly as soon as you lose 10 pounds. The hat (in its hatbox) you wore to your sister's wedding. Your old set of electric hot rollers.

Use this rule of thumb when moving aboard and keep it in mind as you make your semi-annual junk sweep forever after: If you haven't used it, worn it, or looked at it in six months, get rid of it.

What, exactly, is the cost of storing the things you don't use? Which is worth more to you: the space taken up by that extra winter jacket or the possibility that you may find a use for it one of these days? You are going to have to make yourself stop saving clothes that have gone out of fashion, unfinished

craft projects, plastic butter tubs and socks that don't match.

The hardest things for me to let go were my books. I had saved every book I ever owned. I reluctantly narrowed it down to my favorites and gave the rest away. Books still manage to jump into my shopping cart at odd intervals, and my husband swears that they follow him home, so about once every six months we weed through the shelves and make a donation to the lending library at the marina.

A New Frame of Mind

As you unclutter your life you will hear the voice of your mother ringing in your head. You know what I mean, she — or perhaps her mother — survived the Great Depression. They find a way to reuse everything and *never throw anything away*.

The truth is that if you live on a boat you have to ignore that voice and be ruthless in the Battle of the *Stuff*. Give it away if you can, but if nobody wants it or the Goodwill doesn't pick up until next month, toss it. I don't care if it still works or if someone might know someone who can use it. Get rid of it — quick! Before you change your mind. . .

Lisa Odaffer is a stay-at-home mom and a part-time writer. She and her husband, Jay, and three boys, Alex, 14, Jamie, 5, and John, 4, live on their 45-foot Hardin ketch, *Blue Heaven*. Their homeport is Alameda, California. They are currently docked in Bradenton, Florida.