

IN SEARCH OF NEW CHALLENGES

Linda Crew-Gee

(Linda attained Full Member status in 2017 after six years as an Associate, by sailing thousands of miles in the Pacific with Pete Hill aboard his 33ft junk-rigged catamaran Oryx. It was not her first taste of the ocean, however. In late 2013 she left New Zealand to sail round Cape Horn to the Falkland Islands aboard STS Tecla – see Flying Fish 2016/2 – but at 25m that vessel exceeded OCC limits. This is the tale of a lifestyle change and an altogether smaller boat...)



**With Pete Hill
aboard Oryx**

At the end of November 2016 I packed my bags and cast off from my London houseboat where I had lived for the previous thirty years. At the beginning of that year I had returned from Croatia to London with the

firm intention of finding a job by April. Soon I received an offer that could not be refused, but rejected it on realising that deep inside I did not want to work. I wondered what I really did want. Soon the answer came in the form of an e-mail from Annie Hill in New Zealand asking me if I wanted to sail around the world with Alan. Although I did not know much about Alan and his boat, and nor did I plan to circumnavigate the globe, I knew I wanted to go. My life suddenly took a different turn.

By chance I came across some verses that resonated within me. The first one was part of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* by the Irish poet WB Yeats, which includes the lines:

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

There were also the lyrics of one of the Arctic Monkeys' songs:

This is how you are
Or have to be
In a decadent city
At the time of greed.

I realised that my love for London was gone. Constant destruction of its soul had become painful to watch and I wanted to leave. At the same time, the pressure of needing more money intensified. A trivial episode with a bag of garden compost started me thinking ‘Why do I need more money, why should I work to buy things that I do not need and without which I can live – like compost?’. I made a profound and lasting decision not to work any more. It turns out that my life change was brought about by a purchase (or not) of a bag of compost.

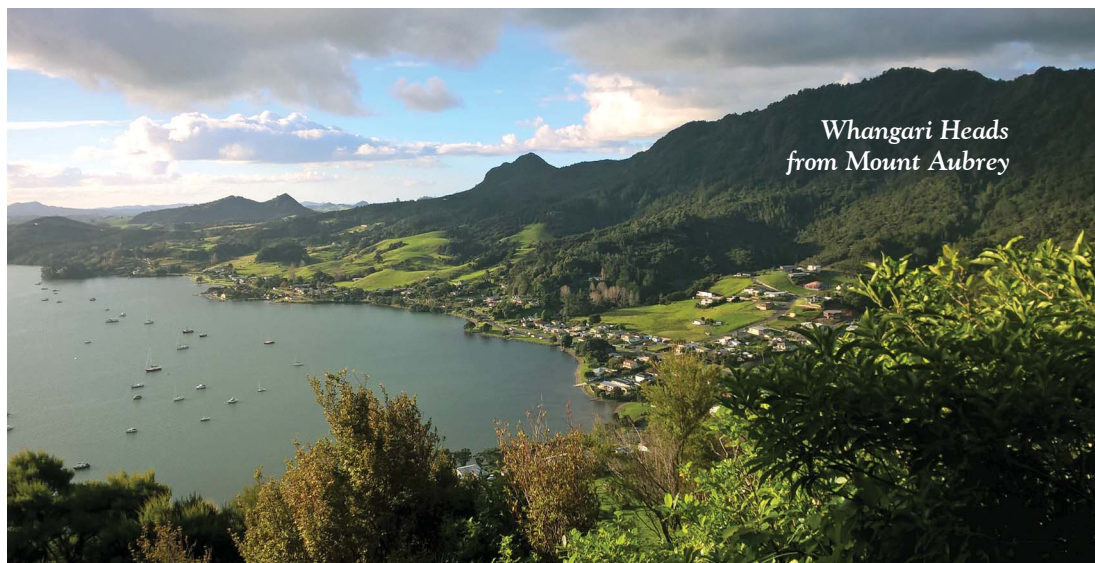
Closing a chapter

I met up several times with Alan to firm up the plan – we would sail around New Zealand for three to four months and if everything was okay on board, we would go around the world starting from Borneo. I hardly could wait for this to happen and immediately started getting rid of most of my worldly possessions. The most difficult was to part with around 100 pairs of shoes! Many of them held precious memories and I knew that if I could give them to charity, I would be free to leave. In some ways it was symbolic – my life on a hard ground was over, and for a new life at sea I did not need high-heeled shoes!

Disposing of things was cathartic. It represented the closing of a chapter in my life, but also the beginning of a new chapter where there was no room for many possessions. I moved on mentally and emotionally, even feeling physically much lighter. I was very happy to be left with only 130 kilograms of personal luggage (including a bicycle) to be transported to my parents’ home in Croatia.

Ready to go and elated, I sent Alan a message and received an unexpected and brief answer: ‘Sorry, but I have to cancel everything’. What a shock! I was without money, work or suitable shoes and clothes. I had a one-way ticket to New Zealand and no entry visa. I sank deep, wondering what to do. My dream was over.

A friend, seeing me so upset, suggested that I go back to work for a year, but I rejected this. The decision to change my life had not been easy to make and had required huge amounts of energy at all levels, and if I returned to work I did not think it would be possible for me to generate so much energy and determination again. I decided that I would not change or question my decision, and that I would go to New Zealand anyway.



Roller-coaster

After this episode I devised my own 'manifesto' – to create new friendships, buy my own boat, convert it to junk rig, learn to sail it, write about it, and then sail it wherever the sea took me. I emailed Annie and Alan asking for help. They both responded, and within hours five people got back to me, willing to help with accommodation and/or sailing. I could not believe it. I had suddenly found myself in an even better position than before – life had suddenly turned for better!

Excited about this development, I wanted to spend more time in New Zealand with these generous and hospitable people. I applied for an extended-stay visa which I received very quickly. I was now over the moon and realised I would have plenty of time to meet the goals in my manifesto. I asked Annie to continue searching for a boat for me, and soon there was another e-mail with a link for the boat. It said: "You did ask!"

In disbelief I looked at the pictures of a tiny, sweet and gorgeous sailboat, an irresistible beauty. I called the owner in NZ who had built her some 40 years ago and had owned and cared for her ever since. I told him that I was buying her and asked him to look after her for me until I arrived. A new adventure had started!

Soon I left London, my heart filled with happiness from the beautiful life I had lived there, appreciating the wonderful friends I was leaving behind but at the same time excited about the new life waiting for me in the southern hemisphere and enchanting New Zealand. On arrival in New Zealand I had no fixed plans – everything was open. This suited me perfectly because I could catch every opportunity when it appeared. I lived in the small, quiet village of Stillwater in the suburbs of Auckland, with my wonderful host and new friend Roger. Without him life would certainly have been different and much more and difficult.



Freshly painted and launched

New friends

Roger's always-present help was incredible and of great importance, and I soon realised that he was one of the nicest people I had ever met. He drove me to many beautiful places. To celebrate my arrival Roger had organised a welcome party, and to my surprise more than 20 junk rig members and friends turned up. I struggled to find anything suitable to wear in my mainly sailing gear wardrobe, but managed to buy a colourful outfit and a new pair of shoes – old habits die hard! I was very happy to have the opportunity to talk and laugh with so many new friends. I even drank a glass of rum in the early hours of the morning.



That evening set the tone of my new sailing life in New Zealand, and was important to everything that followed. During the first month I went aboard numerous boats, met many extremely friendly and dear people, participated in several regattas and sailed over 1000 miles, not always in the best weather!



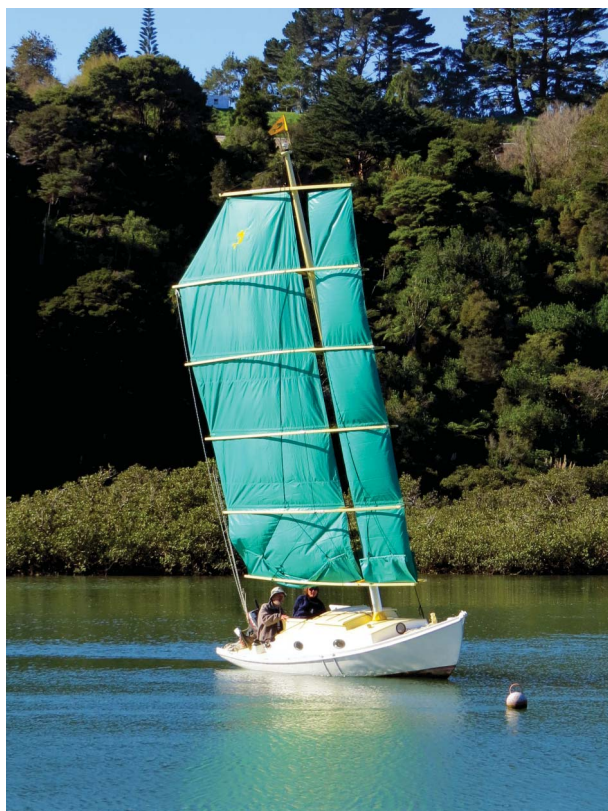
A masterpiece

As for the small wooden sailing boat I bought while I was still in London, she turned out to be a Buzzard Bay 14 (actually 17ft LOA), a masterpiece by one of the greatest and most famous designers, the legendary L Francis Herreshoff. She is called *Francis H*. When I first saw her, hidden in the yard under an olive tree in Kerikeri, I was even more convinced that our union was meant to happen, despite the distance. Mr Murray, who built *Francis H* in 1974, had invested a lot of effort in restoring his pet boat. I spent a few wonderful days with him and his family sanding her hull and painting her. Then she was transported to Stillwater, where I soon launched her.

Sitting in her cockpit when she floated I was overwhelmed with joy. Little trickles of water came through

Sailmaking

her planking but nothing like as much as I had been warned might happen. She was solidly and tightly built and within twelve hours there was no water coming through at all. Her charming lines and the grace with which she floated delighted me, as well as my first glass of wine on her deck at sunset.



Many passers-by stopped to admire her beautiful lines, which made me very proud. Soon I had ordered all the materials for the construction of the mast, and Pete had pulled out of his secret repository green sail material that soon became *Francis's* sail. But that's another story...!



The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the Western stars...'

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Ulysses*