

IS THERE LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE? Misty Fitch

(Misty and Peter, encouraged by the classic book Sell Up & Sail, did just that in 1993 with the purchase of Tamoure, an Oyster 435. They were full time liveaboards for 25 years, mostly along the standard tropical route, arriving in Southeast Asia in 2010. The following years were spent exploring the region by sea and air before selling Tamoure in January 2018. They have settled in a Tamoure-sized Park Home in the west of Scotland.)

Don't worry, this isn't an account of a near death experience, just some musings and advice on how to cope with the inevitable – selling your beloved boat and moving to the 'other side'. For some it will be a relief, but for many long term/distance sailors it won't be easy. A wise broker said to me long before we put *Tamoure* on the market: "It comes to us all eventually...", and so it came to us in January 2018 (much helped by placing *Tamoure*, quite by chance, in the capable hands of another OCC member).

Walking away for the last time will not be easy. My solution was an unexpected – but very therapeutic – emotional meltdown in the arms of a dear friend the night before. This was probably a relief for Peter as well, since I'd heard him say to someone a few weeks earlier, "I don't know what she'll be like on the last morning...". Thanks to the meltdown 'she' had no tears left to shed and was able to walk away dry-eyed, to the astonishment of many.



That's not sea, that's pumice!
Tamoure anchored off Savu Savu, Fiji

other with a boat that can neither be handled nor sold easily. This is the worst case scenario – and the departed one would probably agree.

However, life ashore will be miserable if only one of you wants it. We were fortunate in that we both recognised when our time was up. I remember surfing down wilder than expected seas between two islands on our annual sojourn from Langkawi, Malaysia to Phuket, Thailand when Peter said, "The joy has gone...". Yup – it had, for both of us. Mind you, it was a further 18 months before the S word was mentioned, and another 14 before the boat was actually For Sale, so no one can accuse us of making the decision hastily! But it was the right one when the time came.

Since the majority of long time/long distance cruisers are 'of a certain age', an important aspect in moving to the other side is to do it before it's too late. No matter the immediate upheaval in your life – and your heart – that comes with selling the boat, you should aim to do so while you have health, motivation and a certain degree of fitness with which to create and enjoy your new life. I suspect several members reading this could tell a tale or two of encountering an old couple, running out of money, health and days. Eventually one dies, leaving the

We are now well-settled in the west of Scotland, feeling very pleased at how things worked out. Several friends have recently admitted to being worried that we would never get to this point, and that they're very relieved that we have. Peter regularly says how 'lucky' we are, but it took a lot of hard work to create that luck. While he hasn't looked back, and feels a massive weight has been lifted from his shoulders, I haven't found it quite so easy to delete 25 years from my 'hard drive'. I have no regrets about moving ashore – the day had to come – but am regularly awash with memories and feelings of nostalgia for times past. When England was knocked out of the World Cup in the summer of 2018 I read a comment online which could have been written just for me: "Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened!"

Anxiety levels have dropped considerably. Many years ago a fellow yachting coiner the term 'constant potential danger', which sums up the cruising life perfectly. There's always something to worry about – too much wind, sudden squalls, dragging anchor, docking manoeuvres, what's that funny noise? And what someone called 'sleeping with one eye open...'. Some things we do not miss! Most anxieties come from weather, but we encountered one in Fiji from a very unexpected source: an underwater volcano. Anchored off Savu Savu many years ago, we woke in horror one morning to find ourselves surrounded by a carpet of pumice about 4 inches deep, stretching all the way to the shore. Impossible to run either the engine or escape captivity by dinghy, we were trapped all day. Passage-making brings even greater hazards, one of which was summed up eloquently by the Skipper: "If you get antifouling on the genoa while underway in 40 knots, you know you're in a bit of trouble". Yes – some things we do not miss!

Re-entry has not been without its challenges, however. The world has moved on since 1993, and more than once I've thought we should be sent on a rehabilitation course, like they do for orang-utans before returning them to the wild. We frequently encounter technological challenges. Gadgets are a lot more sophisticated since last we owned a house, offering far more choice in their operation than we're used to – or know what to do with. I spend an awful lot of time poring over instruction leaflets. Don't get me wrong, we love our gadgets, not least the large front-opening 'fridge/freezer where you can see all the contents at once and the appliance just sits there and works. Hygiene apart, it requires no further attention. Best of all, you can go away for any length of time and it will still be working perfectly on your return. Who wouldn't like that?

Shopping generally is heaven, though choice can be overwhelming. Imagine getting everything on your list in one shop! We hadn't done that since July 2010, just before leaving Australia. It's lovely to buy alcohol free from staff disapproval, and if you're looking for pork it's right there in front of you – no need to be taken under whispered escort to the back shop in search of 'special meats'. Mind you, gin at £6 a bottle (in duty-free Langkawi) is a thing of the past! Customer service in Malaysia is poor to non-existent, "no have..." and "finish..." being the favoured response to a customer enquiry. It's a delight to find helpful assistants who don't just say "Aisle 9" but escort you there in person. Little things landsmen may take for granted are a joy to us orang-utans.

Unfortunately I still suffer from "last shop in the universe" syndrome, which afflicts every sailor preparing to go offshore for any length of time – grab it now, pile it high, because it might be a while before you see it again. We have a wonderful array of kitchen cupboards which at first we thought we'd never fill, but passagemaking habits are hard to shake off. We are now commendably well-stocked, with a spare for every

spare – and ten toilet rolls under the bathroom sink! A trip to B&Q almost makes us weep – all the things we’ve missed and compromised over in Malaysia are right there on the shelves. Familiar-looking solvents, glues, fillers – and now we don’t need them. Solvent in Malaysia is sold in unmarked dark glass bottles. It does the job, but who knows what it contains or what it’s doing to your skin.

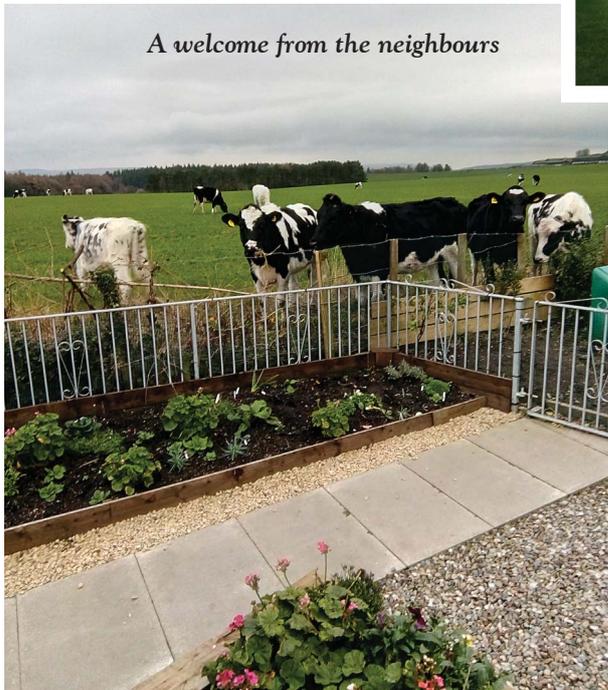
Packing up the ship was hard, with memories in every locker. Peter wisely left me to it and, to his credit, now that we’re home hasn’t said a word about the unsuitability of some of my choices. We were never big on souvenirs due to lack of space, so what we kept was pretty special, and sadly some of them just don’t work. That colourful Indian throw, pretty Guatemalan blanket, delicate Burmese parasol favoured by monks in orange robes – lovely objects in their own way, but out of place in our new surroundings.

Having shipped stuff we don’t want, we’re missing things we took for granted – all those odds and ends, bits and pieces, in a cluttered drawer or box, kept just in case. When Peter called for a small piece of wire whilst erecting a bird feeder shortly after we arrived, he was surprised at my reply: “No have...”. It takes years to accumulate junk! Mind you, it’s nice to be freed from hoarding empty jars, old toothbrushes, smelly towels, the things you keep on a boat, not for ‘just in case’ but because they have their uses.

Unlimited water and electricity is heaven, though I still don’t clean my teeth with the tap running. An early purchase was a smart weather system displaying temperature, wind, barometer etc, plus a phone containing such a comprehensive selection of weather apps you’d think we



A welcome from the neighbours



Our new berth in January ...

were going to sea! You do get a lot of weather in the west of Scotland, but if you’re not on a boat it seldom scares you. The wind can roar as much as it likes and the rain lash down, but The Mansion, as it’s been affectionately christened, is as solid and watertight as you could wish for. Being brand new it requires minimal maintenance, and although we still have a Jobs List it contains delightful entries like install hook, adjust hinges, hang mirror ... nothing too strenuous there!



... and our new berth in July

The purchase of a car brought the nastiest surprise of all – insurance. If you haven't lived in UK for the last three years, and therefore can't produce a recent no claims bonus – it matters not that you might be a UK tax payer and in receipt of UK pension(s)



– you are seen as a serious insurance risk and will be stung for an alarming sum of money. In my case over £1000, a very nasty shock that we didn't see coming, though substantially reduced after only one year, thank heavens. Cost apart, a car at the door is a luxury, free at last from that well-known yachtie burden – walking long distances carrying heavy loads.

A major downside of the full time cruising life is being branded 'not normally resident in UK', a label we couldn't dispute even though we don't have residency anywhere else and are both tax payers and UK pension recipients. Now that we have 'resumed our residency', it's very nice to be eligible to vote, use the NHS and carry an old folks' bus pass.

Scots accents can be heard the world over, but I've missed those quaint little words and phrases peculiar to my native land, usually very expressive and requiring translation for those of other nationalities. We were about to get into the car and go shopping one day when a neighbour approached, a friendly but lonely widower whom Peter rather mischievously calls the watchman (he doesn't miss much!). His dapper appearance belies a very strong Glasgow accent: "Are youse goan oot fur yer messages?" Yes – it's good to be home!

And so to that old chestnut – 'what do you do all day?' One of us has a garden, and claims to have nearly as many gardening implements as he had tools on the boat. Landscaping was minimal so he could start from scratch. This gave him a busy and rewarding summer and brought many well-deserved compliments from the neighbours. The other one has a ship.

While Peter's been busy in the garden I've found an equally satisfying hobby. Last summer I trained to be a guide on *Maid of the Loch*, the last paddle steamer built in the UK, right here on the Clyde, in 1953. In 1981 she was abandoned and left to rot, but in 1996 was brought back from dereliction by a charity, set up by a handful of dedicated volunteers.*

She's been a static attraction on Loch Lomond since 2000, being restored as funds permit. A small team of guides are on duty at weekends to give tours, answer questions and extract money through donations and the sale of *Maid* merchandise. I seem quite good at this, especially extracting money, which I blame on years of being pestered by those annoying touts of Southeast Asia! A recent injection of £1 million from the Scottish Government will allow some major renovations to take place, a big step towards fulfilment of the dream that she will one day sail up the Loch again.

Kind friends worried how we'd cope with UK weather, but they needn't have. It's a joy to be released from the energy-sapping heat and humidity of Asia, and nothing beats snuggling down under a cosy duvet instead of lying in a pool of sweat, hoping you won't have to get up in the night and deal with a tropical downpour. We came back to the coldest, snowiest winter, followed by the hottest, sunniest summer and then the windiest, wettest autumn. Having coped with all that I think we'll manage whatever 2019 has in store!

* Visit her fascinating website at <https://www.maidoftheloch.org>.



Two maids hoping for a make-over.
Photo Lesley Roberts Media Production

