

L·I·V·I·N·G A·B·O·A·R·D

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Friends and family discouraged them, but this couple is sticking with their ambition: living aboard. Page 15.

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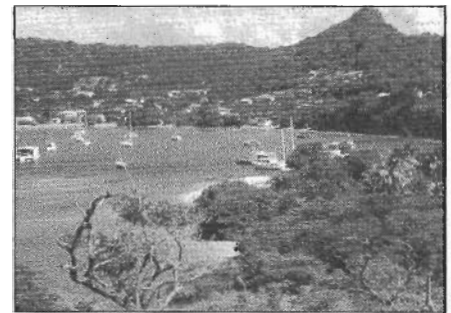
Of course you love those big, thick, luxurious terry towels — except when cruising, then not so much. They are a pain to launder, slow to dry, and occupy too much space. So what's the best towel for cruisers?

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A liveaboard couple discovers that a real appreciation of Carriacou Island requires “going native.” Page 22.



They had their liveaboard plan all thought out — then came Hurricane Katrina! Page 33.

WE DID IT!

A LIFE FILLED WITH AMBITION



The Kalik 44, a great compromise between a strong bluewater vessel and comfy home.

by Erika Lelievre

My husband and I are 29 and 27, respectively, full-time working professionals, and, according to our families, we have

“gone nuts.” Up until the present, we were doing the right thing, according to our families. In 2004 we bought our house and spent a year renovating, repainting and landscaping. For two and a half years we lived in a quiet, friendly neighborhood where kids could safely ride their bikes in the street and drivers would slow down and wave. Our mailman slipped our mail through the front door slot, and our four cats could come and go as they pleased.

Part of our picture-perfect postcard routine was our Sunday breakfast at Marnick’s, a diner in Stratford, Connecticut, right on Long Island Sound.

We would sit at the windows looking at Port Jefferson, Long Island. It was in the dead of winter with boats on the water. It was at Marnick’s, gazing out the windows, where things came into view.

I grew up in a sailing family, living weeks at a time with my grandfather moored in New Harbor, Block Island, Rhode Island, first on a sailboat (destroyed by Hurricane Gloria) and, later, on a trawler named *Thistledome*. It was a typical, male-dominated atmosphere in which the women and children followed orders. As a result, I never really learned how to sail. My father, like his father, turned relaxing weekends on the

water into boot camp. Water remained a passion of mine, yet sailing was more than I could take.

My husband has a different sailing history. At age 6 he started

sailing on Hobie Cats. Charles had his first 16’ powerboat when he was 10, worked after school at a marine service department at 13, and was a dockmaster at 15. By 16 he lived aboard a 32’ Pembroke powerboat (that sunk twice) and made money doing saltwater fly fishing charters, and by 17 he worked at Dutchman MVB, Inc., the maker of the famous Dutchman sail-flaking system, as a CAD designer. He continued to be a liveaboard and bought a Soverel 28 sloop. He then managed to get wrapped up in the dot-com years as a creative director, sold the boat, and crawled back onto land. He is now the

director of technology and engineering at a radio firm, building and operating radio stations all across the nation. While his family expected him to play Little League games, go to New York University like his father, and make the big bucks, they had to suffer through having their roof littered with radio antennas, boats in every corner, and all electronic devices within reach being disassembled.

With our shared love of the water, we found ourselves at Marnick's doing some serious thinking over bacon and eggs. Thinking soon turned into daily

"What about my future grandbabies?"
 "Although I might not choose this lifestyle as my own, I will support you."
 "I dare you."
 "I do not feel you are making a wise decision."
 "What are you *thinking*?"
 "You want to *live* in a boat?"
 "A house is an appreciating asset, but a boat is a depreciating asset."
 "This is what you do when you are retired."
 "It's a hardship."
 "What are you going to do in the winter?"



Charles sails her home.

trips to our local mega-bookstore for magazines and books, which expanded into five- or six-hour voyages through yachtworld.com. We thought about the future, jobs, and kids and realized the sacrifices, but were ultimately won over by the liveaboard lifestyle. The next big step: telling friends and family.

Their reactions ranged from a roll of the eyes to intent interest. I will list just a few choice pieces of advice:

"Don't listen to anyone in this place, just do it and take me with you."

"Get it out of your system now."

"Are you sure you don't want to keep the house?"

"What if there's a hurricane?"
 "Can you even take a shower?"
 "They're young, they don't know any better!"

"Stop dreaming."
 "You'll learn fast about lifestyles."

Some who care about us simply refuse to believe a boat is in our future plans. Battles are still waged and comments continue, yet our yearning for the sea hasn't wavered. I won't lie, it is exhausting responding to all of the "what ifs" and "you shoulds," but we accept the fact that most of them simply do not understand, nor would they ever choose the liveaboard lifestyle.

We have now sold not only our house, but most of our belongings as well. The only things we've kept are the kind of necessities needed for a long camping trip (plastic and stainless only), including tools, and a very little memorabilia. About two weeks before we moved, we had an enormous full-house tag sale. At the time it was difficult telling ourselves that it was all "just stuff." I had glass animals that I had collected as a kid, a table that Charles' grandfather had built, my wedding gown, photo albums, and many other close-to-the-heart memorabilia about which we had to make decisions.

The key is knowing that most of these objects will remain with us as memories. To be surrounded by your built-up memorabilia of a lifetime can be comforting, but if you plan on taking the liveaboard route, you need to find a point in your life where you will be comfortable jotting down notes or taking pictures of those items for memory's sake, and then finding these items new homes. I do admit to being surprised when concerned relatives called to make sure we were not selling their wedding gifts.

Today, we don't miss a thing (OK, I had to buy another "how to" guitar book). I kept the wedding china and gown, picture albums, and a few kid relics such as baby blankets. It all fits in two large Tupperware containers. I'd have to say that, as hard as it was then, it feels great now. You'll never know the effects unless you've done it.

We're living the simple life now. We find ourselves bouncing from one apartment to the next waiting for the right boat. We put memorabilia and tools into a 5'-by-5' storage space for \$90 a month. It's sobering knowing that all of your belongings are in a space smaller than your old closet — and it's not even full!

These days we have two large rectangular Tupperware bins for clothes and two cardboard hanging wardrobe boxes. I borrowed my mother's guest bed mattress, which sits on the floor. Our food and glassware fit into the one-and-only kitchen cabinet, with plates sitting in a dish rack on the counter for future use (which works out really well, actually).

We are now going on dates to the laundromat every Friday night before the weekend rush. Shopping is not even an option. If a new item comes in, an

old one has to go. Our rule is whatever we buy needs two uses (it's amazing — and often amusing — how creative one can get to find a second use for something that's not really needed). I never thought it would be exciting to take the weekly trip to the post office and get magazines and mail to read. We also haven't watched television in three months. That took some getting used to, but now I don't think I want it back. I am currently learning French, and I have never read so many books in my life. At this point our library of boat books is beyond what the local mega-bookstore can offer.

Life is simple these days, and now that we have future plans and goals that are in sight, it is very exciting. I am now working to live rather than living to work, and I can't tell you the difference that has made.

When we started to hunt for the boat, we saw close to 50 different vessels. The first boat we saw was a Formosa 51. I fell in love with it, and my husband had nightmares. I'm still in love, and my husband still has nightmares. I loved the William Garden layout, but soon came to realize it might be dangerous cooking in an open galley on rough seas.

Here are some things I've learned about buying a boat:

Tip #1: Do not fall in love with a boat. I was so fed up at one point, I was ready to settle on a 20' Flicka Pacific Seacraft. Great quality, really salty, most everything I wanted in a boat, so let's just cram ourselves in and leave! My husband didn't like the idea of sleeping with his face next to the port-a-potty, however.

Tip #2: Do not settle for a boat. We looked at a boat (a Valiant 40) on which the keel was delaminated to the point where an arm could fit into the void, and one rotted to the point where my finger stuck through the coach roof. One Irwin 46 had termites and a bent mast. On one boat, a survey found that the manufacturer had never attached the chain plates to the shrouds. The owner, not knowing this, sailed the boat for five years and had pulled the deck from the main bulkhead. This boat was not insurable. But it looked great!

We took time to rethink our plans before narrowing our search. Our crite-



Who's bathing whom? The refrigerator gets its first bath (above).

ria: priced at \$75,000, tops (money from the house), length between 40 and 45 feet, draft no deeper than 6.5 feet, no teak decks, 1978 model or newer, no wooden spars, seagoing galley as part of the living area, at least two separate cabins, ample water and fuel, and a diesel engine with sufficient horsepower.

Learning that buying a boat is much more complicated than buying a house, we finally put a deposit on a 1981 Kalik 44 designed by Gary Mull. It fits our budget, draws 6.5 feet (which makes us a bit uncomfortable), has no teak anywhere on deck, no wooden spars, a good sea-going galley, three cabins, two heads, ample water and fuel, and a 63 horsepower Yanmar. Looking like a sleek racer, it is the farthest thing from a salty boat, which is what we had originally wanted, yet has it all.

Our plans for cruising are simple at this point. Charles has invested his



SOLD — February 2007!

heart into a company he loves working for, and I still find joy in my job as a science teacher. We will continue to save and build our cruising kitty for a few more years while living on the boat and casting off weekends. Our goal — our dream — is to eventually head south, make a hard left, and start our journey around the world.

So far we have made one firm decision. We have chosen a name for our boat: *Ambition*.