

Pris Campbell

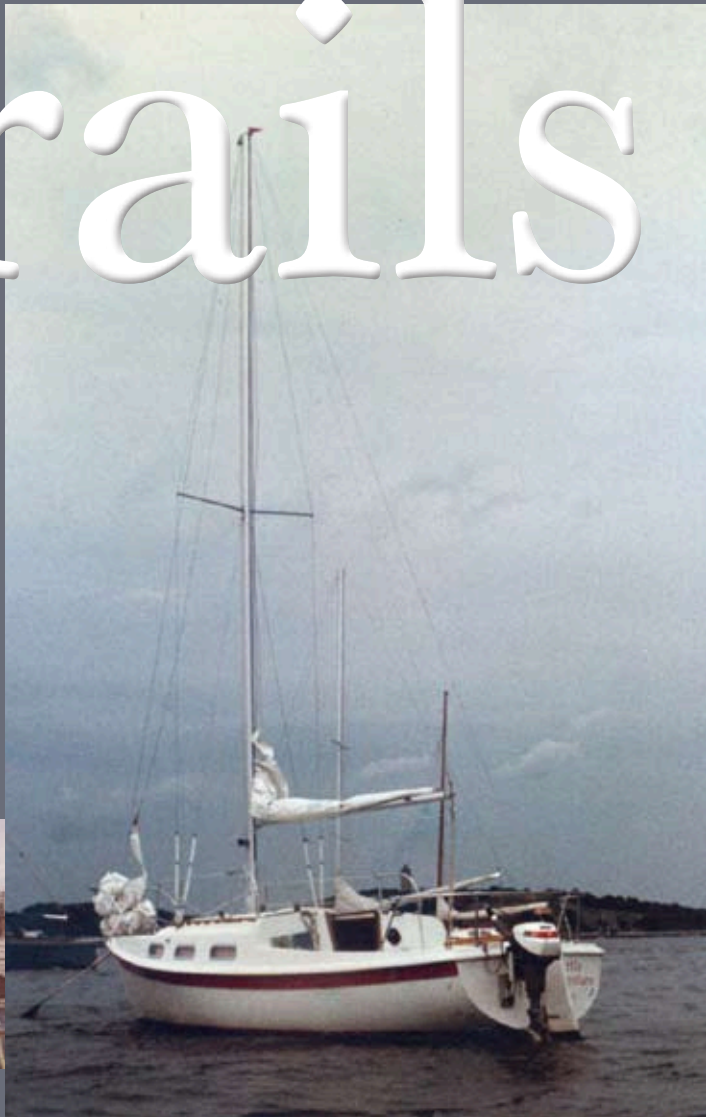
Sea Trails

Poems and

1977

Passage

Notes



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Sea Trails



How It Began

This 1977 trip was the fulfillment of a dream that the man I will only refer to as R and I had, individually. Together, we decided to make it reality. We lived in a commune in Boston where expenses were low, but we still put ourselves on a strict budget for two years. No frills allowed. My income was the one high enough to qualify for a boat loan after we discovered the boat that was to become Little Adventure. In the late seventies, women still couldn't be granted a loan unless a husband or financially responsible male co-signed. I went to the bank manager after being turned down by the assistants. He turned out to be a sailor, himself, broke the rules and gave me the loan. For that, I'm grateful. I'm also grateful that such limitations no longer exist for women.

Over the next two years we took Power Squadron courses on everything from what knot fits what occasion to advanced navigation to sail to engine

maintenance. We practiced sail maneuvers and man overboard drills as part of our preparation. Our savings were meant to last for a year. They came mostly from my salary while R paid off an old college loan. I also paid health insurance for a year in advance for us both at a time when that was completely affordable for people who weren't wealthy.

Our relationship, however, was dying as the time neared for us to go, but the trip had taken on a life of its own. R's anger over my job success compared to his was a barbed wire for me to deal with. His eye was beginning to rove, too. I wanted this trip, though, and wasn't out of love yet. Maybe I hoped the trip would bring back what we'd lost. We gave notice in our jobs, said our good-byes and left.

Was it crazy? Yes, in terms of our deteriorating relationship. No, in terms of what was to become one of the most meaningful adventures of my lifetime.

>>Log Entry—

Little Adventure: Fitting out the boat. June 1977

Little Adventure is a Tanzer 22 fin keel sailboat, purchased second-hand in Marion, MA, in late 1974. No standing head room in the cabin. She came with two regular jibs (Genoa for light winds and standard size), one small storm jib made of thick canvass, and a compass. R and I add a depth sounder, odometer, ship to shore radio and, before our trip, a second five gallon gas tank and homemade spinnaker. We purchase an Avon to serve as combination dinghy and life raft to replace the fiberglass dinghy we owned the first two years. A supply of paperback books are stored on a shelf in the main cabin where one quarterberth cushion slides back and a pop-up table comes up for meals and for chart space for course plotting.

As the trip's leave date nears, jeans and tee shirts are packed into two duffel bags and warmer clothes combined into a third, smaller duffel bag. Nets in the V-berth hold our toiletries. Wet gear hangs from a hook. Canned goods are stored in plastic bins beneath the quarter berths. Potatoes and onions hang from a net in the cabin. Block ice goes into a small front-opening ice chest built into the boat below the stove and sink. We have no hanging locker, no head. A porta potty will have to do. Our cat Monster's litter box sits under the lip of the V-berth where we'll sleep. A two-burner alcohol stove is mounted next to a sink too small to do dishes in. A bucket will do for that. Our goal is to make it to Florida, then across the Gulf Stream and down the Abacos, possibly ending up in New Orleans, a city we feel will be similar in spirit to Boston.

Sea Trails

I must go down to the sea again...

—John Masefield

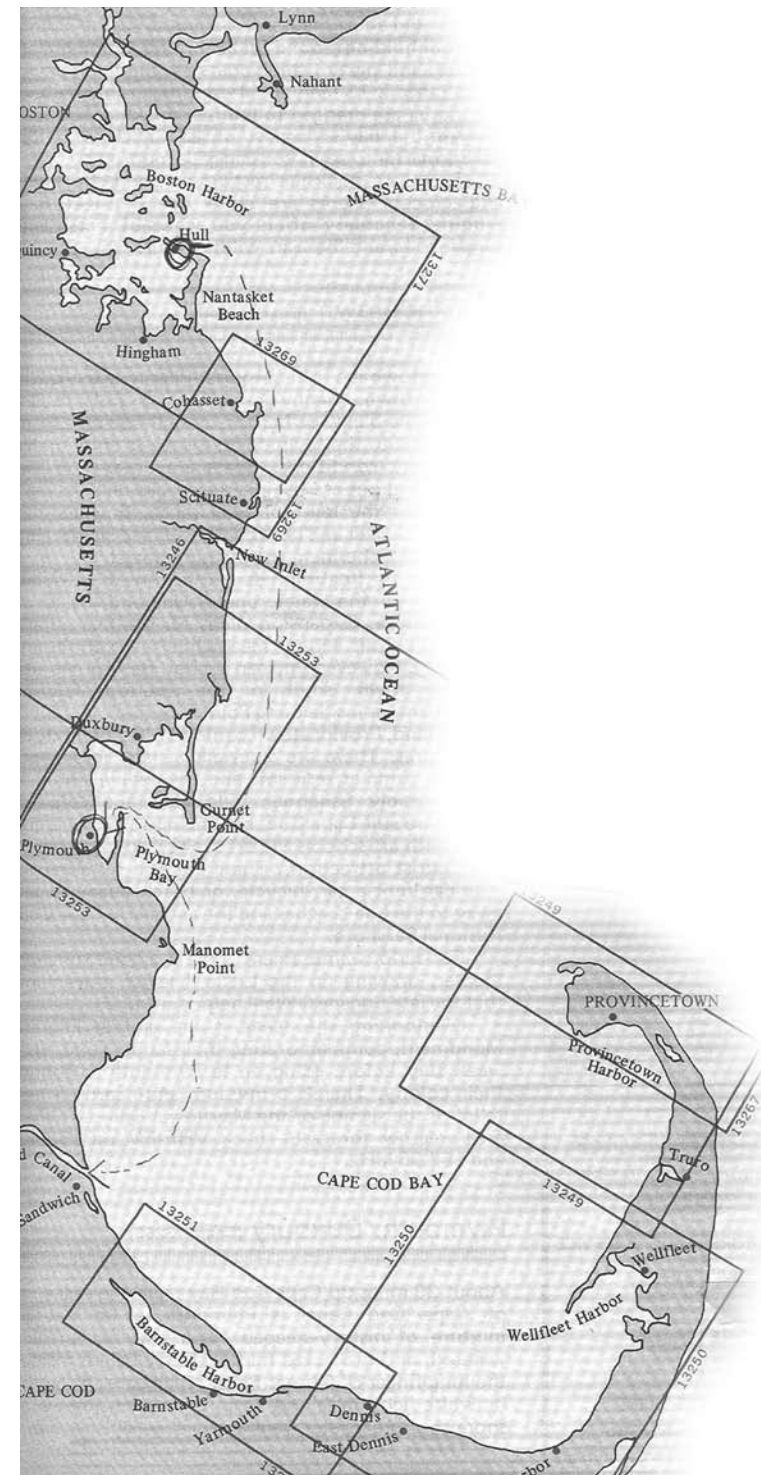
I board the tiny sloop that has carried me
twice to Maine with its deep
silent harbors and moaning buoys.
I'm ensnared, trapped by increasing
longings to ride that magic carpet
into places different from my own
narrow world of nine to five rewind.
Saltwater rises through my body,
is transformed through its heat
into golden mist. I expand
without Alice's cookies,
become a gull dropping clams
on the rocks to crack them,
a molting lobster, a leaping dolphin,
a man watching the sky from a deserted dock.
The sea is my cradle and it rocks me,
lulling me into new ways of seeing.
My arms unfurl into sails.
I let the wind take me.

>>Log Entry—

July 4-6, 1977. Home anchorage, Hull, MA to Plymouth Harbor

June winds have finally settled enough to make the trip possible. At 7 p.m., R rows back to the boat with two friends for a moonlight sail, after bringing in the last of our supplies. The skies have cleared and it's warm. The horizon turns red as we look at the Boston skyline for the last time. While we cook supper afterwards, two commune mates arrive with their Irish setter, happy to be reunited with Monster. All of us manage to crowd aboard to say final good-byes. We'll miss Boston. We'll miss good friends.

July 6: High winds kept us from leaving Hull yesterday, so today we head out of Hull Bay towards Harding Ledge. We fly the spinnaker in the light winds, making between 3 to 4 knots speed, then motor through the winding entrance to Plymouth Harbor where we moor next to the Mayflower, within sight of Plymouth Rock. Other boats near us are from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The Cape Cod Canal is next. Our journey has begun.



Spells

We see them from our boat,
 these men and women dressed up
 in Pilgrim clothes, as if Plymouth
 is the new Brigadoon reincarnated
 daily around a fake rock.
 Had I been a real Pilgrim
 I would've run off with a handsome
 Medicine Man, slept on rabbit fur.
 I would've warned my Medicine man
 husband about the carnage already
 brewing on the easterly winds.
 I would've asked him to cast spells
 upon all the birds in the forest
 so their songs would bring peace
 to land-greedy white men with guns
 and Indians painting themselves
 black and orange beside rising war fires.
 Village and woods would be filled
 with children of all colors,
 beads clattering around their necks,
 bellies filled with porridge.
 I try to smoke the peace pipe with my lover,
 one quarter Indian, himself,
 but I never ran off with the Medicine Man
 and the birds never sang their magic.
 He slashes my throat with a word
 and I bleed onto the deck until our boat
 is drenched with the color of sunset.

Why I call him my Lover

He's not my mate.
 Not my husband, either.
 I don't think of him
 as my partner.
 He's not sweetie, hon,
 darlin', or luv.
 I no longer use his given
 name except when calling him.
 We create what seems like love
 in the V-berth each evening
 and, sometimes, for a sail
 flutter, it is again.
 That and the boat
 are our only tether.
 The thread between us
 is bound to break
 by journey's end.
 I fear my fall back to earth
 will be harder than his.

I breathe in the sea air,
 deny craters left
 by growing anger.
 The sky is golden.
 The sea creates its own
 rhythm beneath me.
 Night falls and he kisses me.

Once Upon a Time

It wasn't always like this;
 boxing gloves on,
 barbed-wire fences raised.
 We could melt windows,
 set trees on fire, make stars
 fall from a frozen sky.
 He was my mainsail.
 I was his boat,
 bearing him to wild new shores.
 We drank from the same cup,
 shared passion like fine wine
 until our bodies moved as the tide does,
 finding its way home to the moon again.

Reversals

I hold this picture...
 us, coming west through
 the Cape Cod Canal
 in our proud new boat--not east,
 a different couple then,
 sunlight teasing our hair,
 sky etching us blue into its memory.
 Us, bringing Little Adventure home
 to Hull, hands touching, cheeks flushed.

Now, tide turned, the sunshine grows weary;
 sky fades to pale.
 We head toward rising plovers
 and racing clouds, clanking halyards
 and fluttering sails, sea air swelling our lungs.
 Unknown harbors wait to embrace us,
 to cast roses upon hope that what
 has been lost can still find fresh breath.

Maneuvers at Sea

Tacking or **coming about** is the maneuver by which a sailing vessel turns its bow through the wind so that the wind changes from one side to the other. For example, if a vessel is sailing on a starboard tack (with the wind to starboard) and tacks, it will end up on a port tack, with the wind to port. **Tacking is distinct from jibing where the ship's stern passes through the wind.**

A jibe or gybe is a maneuver where a sailing vessel turns its stern through the wind, such that the wind direction changes from one side of the boat to the other. The mainsail will cross the center of the boat while the jib (forward sail) is pulled to the other side of the boat.

A more complicated maneuver involves letting anger sail past, finding beauty around you when the close-up ugly threatens to intrude.

Rebirth

Tiller clutched between knees for steering,
 crouched over, eyes scanning the horizon,
 I nudge our bow towards the outreached boom.
 When the wind finally loosens its grip,
 I pull the line fast, hand over hand.
 My legs become coils, balancing me
 as we slide into the trough.
 Today's wind turns stronger than a trumpet's wail,
 and the boom pauses mid-ship, as if to warn me,
 crosses over, until our mainsail strains white
 against blue again. A Paul Newman sky.
 The head of our little boat is crowning
 into Newman's eyes.
 I've birthed her hundreds of times
 just as she's birthed me,
 but each time is a new time.
 Umbilical cut, we move towards the open sea.

>>Log Entry—

*July 10-16 Cuttyhunk Harbor, through Martha's Vineyard,
 to Nantucket Island*

We sail to Cuttyhunk, the first of the Vineyard islands, from Quissett Harbor. The passage to the inner harbor is narrow. At low tide there's no room for small boat and ferry to pass. The ferry is the only source of groceries and mail to the island. It also is the only way to get to the island without a small boat. Cuttyhunk is small and quiet. The post office is in someone's home. The grocery store is a small building behind someone else's home. We pay eight dollars for a supply of groceries and are surprised to see cars since the ferry isn't a large one. After exploring the island, we spend two days watching boats come in from as far away as San Francisco and rowing onshore again to admire the long hilly stretches of fields and woods.

July 14: We leave Cuttyhunk for Vineyard Haven. Out of land's shelter, the seas build to six feet and we're tossed about in the swells. The tiller is hard to hold steady. By late morning, the winds die and the seas begin to calm. This portion of the Vineyard is hilly and green with sandy cliffs along the ocean. Fancy homes dot the shoreline. At 1400 hours we round the buoy that marks shoaling out from Vineyard Haven and follow the red and green channel markers into the small harbor. We spend fifteen dollars for groceries, block ice and a bottle of scotch. That evening, we splurge by eating out at an inexpensive pub near the harbor.

July 15: We hoist anchor at 0720. Slight chance of rain predicted. We're pushed off course by the winds and tide. Corrected. Back on course. At 1015 we round black can '21', out of sight of land now in all directions due to the distance between islands and patches of fog. We're a little nervous, hope we haven't been thrown off of our dead reckoning course for Nantucket. At 1220, to our relief, we close in on the buoy that marks our final six mile stretch. Hazy land appears in the distance. At 1451 we enter Nantucket harbor and drop anchor. We're held here until the 27th by gale force winds and small craft advisories throughout the Vineyard.

Unsafe Harbors

Out of the horseshoe that is Cuttyhunk,
 anchor hauled from Vineyard Haven,
 where a hopeful fan mistakes me for Joni Mitchell,
 past where John Kennedy, Jr. is to later plunge
 to his death, we reach Nantucket, cobblestoned home
 to the tourists, small boaters and the wealthy.
 A distant dot on the chart;
 miss it and you're enroute to England.
 It's my birthday and the clanking halyards,
 the ricky-tick shops become my present,
 my 'happy birthday to you', my respite
 from my lover's glares, his increasing nips at my ankles.
 I glow, even in this heartless town where
 hand painted rocks go for hundreds of bucks
 and no homeless sit on the cobblestone begging for cash.
 Its disturbing beauty washes over me,
 like the long warm showers at the marina,
 so when the winds rise later,
 sneaking up through that vulnerable spot
 in the anchorage I'm reminded that
 there are no safe harbors, no havens.
 We run the motor all night, ease the strain
 on the groaning anchor rode, watch
 skeletons of boats slip past our starboard
 and port sides, hope we won't be hit,
 dragged back in this black night along with them.
 Daybreak brings scratched, tangled and beached boats.
 but our shadow passes, unscathed,
 across the morning water.

Small Craft Advisories

We plot our escape past the angry nor'easter
 pummeling the Vineyard with fifty knot punches.
 For seven days and seven nights now,
 we've covered in this tense harbor.
 Birds take shelter in bent trees.
 The sun hides its face in shame.
 Small dogs tuck tails between legs, run inland.
 Double reefed, we nose out Nantucket's
 razor rock jetty, hands bleeding fright.
 Are you crazy, megaphones a Mack Truck,
 disguised as a battened-down fishing boat.
 The Coast Guard roars by, casting its surf.
 Reversing direction, Little Adventure heels hard,
 struggles back up against the seething waves.
 I teeter below into the blend of UFO dishes,
 sliding duffels, flying forks, try to tuck things away.
 Monster leaps to my lap, gouges claws into knees
 in this fear-bond between shaking fur, human skin.
 Re-anchored, we clean and collapse.
 Our boat peels back her hull, reveals inner scars.
 My heart laid open, she already knows mine.

>>Log Entry—

July 27-29 Nantucket to Newport, via Cuttyhunk

We haul anchor at 0810 for the long 45 mile run to Cuttyhunk, as a stopover to our next stop. Newport, Rhode Island. We don't go ashore on this stopover. Instead, we read and go to sleep early.

July 28: We haul anchor to begin our sail at 0900 on a sunny day with light winds from the west. At 1530 we round the final bend to Newport harbor. The first anchorage area is calm but isn't close enough to row to the city docks. Exhausted, we drop anchor, anyway and overnight here.

July 29-August 1: At 0800 we re-anchor closer in to the city docks, where we are surrounded by sailboats from all over the country and some from overseas. A small motorboat comes around, run by two gals, selling doughnuts, newspapers, taking in trash for a .75 cents a bag and even your laundry. Twenty-five pounds of block ice costs a dollar plus 1.50 delivery fee. This service is a first! We go to shore where we shower, grocery shop, do our own laundry, and explore the city. It's America's Cup trials period and time for the Newport to Bermuda race, so Newport is packed with sailors. One evening we visit with an Australian reporter and his wife, here to cover the Cups race. We stay until August 1, then sail on down the coast to Galilee.

Newport Mayhem

Memories of navy years here with my first husband
worm their way into uncertain spaces
between new ones I'm creating. I ghost-walk
docks I walked many times with my ex,
tell him the earth skidded sideways when we split,
speak of old friends, days at Pearl Harbor,
forget he lost the urge to plumb the mystery
I was when we were wed.

Nostalgia gradually lifts.
We stuff ourselves at Salas',
guzzle too many banana daiquiris.
Tipsy, we wander through the mayhem
of Newport during race week.

The birdlike 12 meters, keels wrapped for secrecy,
tremble with excitement, strain at their lines.
Past them, larger sailboats with winches
wide as a fat man's thigh and lines nested
over busy decks, await their sprint for Bermuda.

Parties spill onto the docks.
Excitement crackles like flash lightning.

I've already become part gypsy, but I'm glad
my palm doesn't tell me the Navy base will
close later, enlisted men will no longer
wander the town, the Cup will leave Newport
and malls will spring up like weeds along the harbor,

displacing aging nooks where the Black Pearl
still serves the best clam chowder in town.
I'm glad to sit on Little Adventure
under the darkening plum colored sky, feeling
every fresh second merge with my heartbeat
until my chest splits wide open to the glory of now.

Definitions

line: A rope becomes a line when attached to a boat. It becomes a rope again when completely detached and removed from the boat.

rode: Name used specifically for line tied to the anchor.

scope: The amount of anchor rode let out in an anchorage. The deeper the water and the more severe the weather the more rode you will put out. For recreational boaters you should have out five to eight times the depth of the water plus the distance from the water to where the anchor will attach to the bow. You put out more for overnight or in stormy conditions, less for temporary day anchoring in calm waters.

anchor rode: Line, chain or a combination of both. The whole system of gear including anchor, rode, shackles etc. is called ground tackle.

Dead Reckoning

Dead reckoning involves estimating one's current position based upon a previously determined position, or fix, and advancing that position forward on a chart, based upon known speed, elapsed time, and course. There are no buoys or landmarks to go by, only this course, which must be adjusted along the way as currents, boat speed and winds change.

Galilee

He calls himself Harpoon Louis, rows
to our boat from a once beautiful
but time-betrayed wooden sloop.
The Wayward Wind can still be made out
in faded letters on its stern.
Sad, torn sails, despairing shrouds,
jilted charts with footprints
all over them litter the cockpit.
He's been trying to return home
to Long Island each fall now, he tells us.
The Coast Guard always tows him back in.
He eats from the dumpsters, plentiful
behind the many seafood restaurants
filling this commercial seaport town,
a town where Christ, himself, could
break bread and visitors would be too stuffed
with fresh fish and fritters to notice.
I wonder where Louis sleeps when frost
kisses the air, when snow rests its head
against his cold cabin.
I wonder if his skeleton will someday
be found by a fisherman, hand still on the tiller,
Long Island chart at his feet, fish
circling his keel in mourning.

>>Log Entry—

August 5

August 5: We leave Galilee for Block Island, planning to just overnight in the harbor but not go ashore. 'Doc', on a 37 foot Irwin, whom we met in Newport is there so we spend part of the evening visiting with him on his boat. "Doc' is a 66 year old twice-widowed retired physician. He's been sailing for three years and plans to 'go on as long as he can'.

We arrived just before fog set in and the harbor entrance disappeared. We leave the following morning for Stonington Harbor, CT, marking the very beginning of our trip through Long Island Sound. Thick fog follows us all of the way and we rely on dead reckoning to find our jetty. One-fourth of a mile offshore we finally see land and the jetty is directly in front of us. Hooray! We see several boats we know, visit friends we met earlier now home onshore. We stay in the anchorage for two days.

**This is only a sample of the book.
If you would like to see more, visit
www.lummoexpress.com**

Sea Trails

Pris Campbell

“In a skillful blending of prose and poetry Campbell shares her exciting passage down the east coast from Boston to Florida in a 22 foot sailing sloop. An intimate window on a difficult romantic relationship with her sailing partner, combined with vivid descriptions of adventures at sea and in port, this book will leave you longing to set sail with this able sailor at the helm.”

Margie Stevenson, PhD., Psychologist

“How interesting to actually see the source of inspiration from which Pris Campbell riffs in this fascinating collection. A master at the construction of tightly woven narratives, her work is like the boat itself upon which the reader sails along beside her on this incredible journey.”

Carter Monroe

“I met Pris Campbell at an anchorage off the Delaware Bay during her 1977 sailing trip. We became friends and our two boats sailed several legs of the trip south after that. It’s a pleasure to read her story of this trip, told through poems and log notes. For all you sea lovers and would-be sailors out there, Pris makes the adventure come alive.”

Margaret Rogers, R.N. and former cruising sailor.

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