

# mainsheet

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**IN THIS ISSUE:** An Adventure  
in the Chesapeake

# Whale Watching...In the Nude

By Sharon B. Drechsler

Such a provocative title might lead you to ask, "Why was she watching for whales, in the nude?" What circuitous trail of events had led me to this humble condition — shivering, naked, streaming wet, and yet, stubbornly vigilant...?

This odyssey had its genesis over two years ago, when an associate of my husband, Dick, made a noble promise. The associate, Mike Trowbridge, is one of life's throw-backs to a better time, a better life, a time when men were men and a man's word was his bond. Anyway, I think that's how the saying goes.

Reader, you're not going to believe this, but I'm not lying. We were given — yes, that means free to us, no charge, just because Dick's that-kind-of-guy person—a fabulous, 13-foot, 4-stroke engine-driven Boston Whaler (a Dauntless, for those of you who are in the know). You see, during Mike's early days of starting a new venture, my husband had supplied him with some good advice which helped him get his start. And one night, while in a jubilant mood, Mike swears on his honor that when



Dick and Sharon Drechsler with their new Boston Whaler.

he makes his first million, he will buy Dick his dream tender, a Boston Whaler! Two years go past and Dick and Mike's paths meander in different directions. Then, one recent night, Mike calls to ask where to deliver the boat! Honestly Reader, I'm not making this up, out of the blue, he called!

So it happens that Dick and I set out early to Shock Boats to pick up our new tender. We spend the rest of the morning breaking-in the new vessel as we drive it up the coast from Newport Beach to Long Beach to join Venus Butterfly, our Catalina 36. In honor of Mike's company, Turnkey Marketing, we call our beloved new addition the Turnkey Tender.

After reaching Long Beach in a little more than an hour and a half (which gave our 5-to-7-knots-an-hour-sailor-hearts a flutter), we hitch the Turnkey Tender to our sailboat's stern and we're off on a trip to Marina del Rey to participate in the Opening Day ceremonies at the Santa Monica Yacht Club!

A brisk, March day with light wind, we raise the mainsail, but also supplement with the motor. Chugging out of the marina into the Long Beach outer harbor, we attempt to set the auto-pilot, only to discover that the wiring has frayed, causing it to malfunction. Dick digs through his toolbox for his electrician's tools and no sooner sets about repairing it, than "Whoop!" Down flops the mainsail.

Somehow (now, I'm not going to pin blame or name names here, although Dick

asked me to use an alias for (him) the snap shackle on the halyard has given way. Dear Reader, this happened to us once before when we had a faulty shackle — and I know what's in store. In desperation I begin suggesting various alternatives: "There's no wind anyway, so let's just motor (I knew that wouldn't be acceptable)." "Didn't you say there was a spare halyard? (This is spoken in a tone similar to a sportsman asking a charging bear for another shot.)" "Do the words "Vessel Assist" and "Sea Tow" mean anything to you?"

No, nothing would do but we must engage the now-functioning auto-pilot, put the most light-weight and trim person (what a salesman) in the bosun's chair and crank her on up to the edge of the stratosphere.

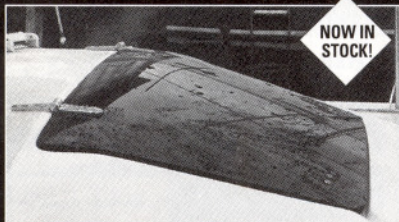
My pleas to at least return us to the calm of our nearby slip fall on deaf ears. "Don't worry," he proclaims confidently, "it's just as calm out here as it is in the marina." Spoken like a man with both feet on the deck, don't you think?

And so it is that I am strapped into a bosun's chair and unceremoniously cranked up the mast by the now-appearing 'spare halyard.' Reader, I must assure you that this is probably something you don't want to do in your lifetime, if at all possible. Disregarding my husband's well intentioned advice ("Don't look down"), I struggle to the top, grab the halyard, and freeze in time for about a century or two. Reader, it's an ominously quiet world up there. It's just you and a bird or two in the kind of silence that resembles a time warp. Slowly, you sway from side to side in a giant, 90-degree arc. After a period in which Genghis Khan could have reconquered the Eastern World, Dick eases me back to the deck. (Actually, Dick's engineer's mind took hold of him here, and he figures a rapid decent will provide a speedy remedy to his shoulder pain. I've still got friction burns on my thighs.)

Now here's the first of many valuable lessons we learned from this trip: When you're retrieving a halyard from

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the top of a mast, be sure to stop at the spreaders on the way down. This handy little tip will help you avoid the necessity of having to be cranked half-way back up again to properly position the main halyard aft of the mast, where it belongs. So much for upward mobility!

That done and the auto-pilot behaving itself, we proceed up the coast for a time, the wind diminished to a zephyr. My husband harkens to the siren call of the Whaler. Here's where we learn another, very valuable lesson: Once you begin a motor-sail, don't stop.

We slow down just enough for Dick to hop aboard the Turnkey Tender. The transfer complete, I crank up Venus Butterfly's motor to her normal 2400 rpms. No sooner is the Whaler cutting figure-eights through her wake, than the sailboat's engine starts spewing smoke like a truant puffing his first cigarette.

Venus Butterfly was jealous. I couldn't blame her, I felt a little neglected, too.

Sure enough, our little pause to allow Dick to switch vessels was just long enough for the raw water intake to suck up a wad of seaweed, overheating the engine. It was evident that one of us had to dive under the boat (in minus-60-degree water) and clear up the problem. Unfortunately for me, I happen to be the only one with a wetsuit. With my heart in my throat, I dive a dozen times under the bobbing hulk of the hull, until at last I locate and clear the invasive blob. I emerge like a victorious plumber and tell Dick that he will just have to deal with any further problems, I'm heading for a hot shower.

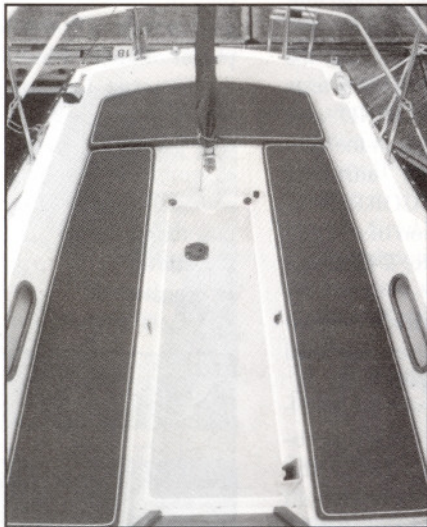
We've now sailed/motored about half-way between Long Beach and Marina del Rey, to the Palos Verdes Peninsula and I've just peeled out of my

wetsuit and stepped into the warm, restorative shower, when, sure enough, Dick spots a whale breaching. It must be a pretty awesome sight. It was certainly something I had whined about (or, dare I say, wailed about?) wanting to see ever since moving to Southern California. I bound onto the deck, dripping and shivering, only to watch a perfectly flat sea. It was about as fun as watching water boil. No, it wasn't really that much fun. I've watched water boil.

And so it was that having swung from the mast and dodged the keel; in the end I was just another nude whale-watcher. Resembling a re-enactment of the Northridge earthquake, I shiver and wait in vain for this apparently truculent behemoth. I never did see the beast, but that's the story of the delivery of the Turnkey Tender and how I was reduced to whale watching in the nude! ♦

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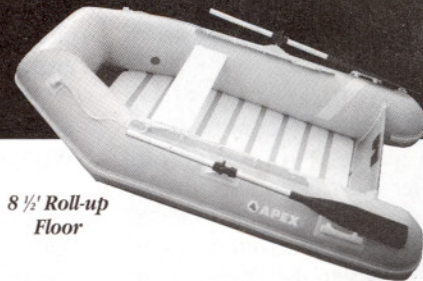


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