

WHOSE DREAM?

by Cheryl Rice - SY Ginseng

How many dreams does a lifetime get
Surely I haven't run through
all of mine yet

What is the stereotype? What is the reality? Are all those bachelors out there single handers by choice? Why are there so many women who profess to love this cruising life? How many women initiated the cruising dream? How many women are along for the ride because of loyalty to the men they love? What is it about this lifestyle that makes a woman who is indifferent to cruising become committed?

Eileen Quinn, singer and songwriter of cruisers' stories deals with these conundrums in many of her clever songs. She examines the complex and varied relationships of cruising couples. She tells of the city girl who leaves behind high-rise living with the luxury of her own room when she falls in love with a sailor. She observes the young woman who falls for a "damn single hander" and loses her sense of place, not to mention her chance to have babies. A grandmother leaves her family, her friends and her garden to join her husband who feels that they are due to be "living the life of their own". In this particular song the grandmother insists on going home only to discover that the things she thought she missed do not a fulfilling life make and she suggests that they "go cruising once more".

But usually the sea casts its spell on the male of the species and the woman who loves him takes up life on his boat, living his dream, often feeling regret, even resentment. She exhibits patience and yet determination. I remember the charming Frenchman I met in an anchorage in Martinique.

"Women are of the earth", he said. "They are willing to live with me on the sea for a time, but eventually they expect to go back to land and they plan to take me with them." Michel Martin was resigned to being alone. He would remain a single hander.

Like Quinn's women most of the first mates I meet are just that, first mates. Although we may joke about being the admiral, traditional role delineation keeps us in our places. We shop, we cook, we clean, we organize. Like Quinn's skippers the male catches the dream. He learns the skills to be captain. When the boat comes into a dock he takes the wheel. When the engine fails he orders the parts. When the toilet plugs, the bilge pump fails, the sink won't drain...he deals with it. As one of my friends says, "This is his dream. He can do the work."

Oh yes, I too know a woman who changes the engine oil, several who have done their captain's papers and many who do the diving to clean the hull. But for the most part the stereotypes hold. The woman puts in her time, 2 to 5 years, insists on going home every summer and daydreams about the kitchen she will have when this phase of life is ended.

And so I was surprised recently, when I talked to a woman for whom the paradigm was reversed. Her husband was going home. He was tired of being a skipper. He was fed up with boat maintenance. He yearned to go home to his grandchildren and to his 5 acres and to his buddies who get together to make music. He plans to ship the boat home and moor it a few miles away. He'll take it out on weekends and holidays. He wants a normal life.

And she wants to stay. She is not ready to give up the dream. She has found crew and negotiated one more season before the boat goes back to America. After that she will have to resign herself to joining friends in the Caribbean for a few weeks each winter. Then, as Eileen Quinn would say she will have to trade her old dream for a new one. What will it be?

The author is interested in hearing the stories of women who went to sea, or merely dreamed of doing so. Please send yours to Cheryl Rice on word pad or Microsoft Word if possible. Her e-mail address is ssginseng@yahoo.ca Receipt will be acknowledged. Perhaps we can publish an anthology.