

A Windjammer Cruise from Hell!
by Bonnie MacFarlane

My first husband and I had just bought our 1st home North of Boston on the ocean. We both loved the water and were planning on buying a sailboat that would sleep 4-6 people. I already knew how to sail and by default, had to teach him. We had several friends who had grown up in Boston, sailing, so we knew we liked it.

It was my bright idea to go on a Windjammer cruise in Maine. A windjammer is a large, OLD ocean going sailboat made of wood. These schooners used to sail logs from Maine “down east” to New York. “Down east” was used to refer to the prevailing winds. The boat had two heads or potties, a kitchen, and bunks that could sleep 40 or more. The crew consisted of only five people so we all had to learn how to furl the sail, hoist it, and lower it when docking.

Now, doesn't this sound like an adventure and a good learning experience? Well, it would have been except for several problems. Our captain was like Captain Bligh and we had little or no wind. The temperature was hot, hot, hot! Most of the people on board were single middle aged folks from NYC who did not want to socialize. However, we did manage to make friends with an older couple who invited us to their grandson's Bar Mitzvah.

The food was great and consisted of three large home cooked meals a day plus fresh baked pie, fruit and coffee mid afternoon. There was no way to walk around the ship to exercise and everyone, except for me, gained 10 lbs. in a week. At the end of the day after docking, my husband and I would dive into the water to cool off, but Maine water is much too frigid for swimming.

There was nothing to do all day long except to bake in the sun and read. I still have a mental image of my husband reading “Jaws” with a sheet wrapped around him to prevent getting fried to death.

As I said, there was very little wind, and one morning, the ship got moored on a sandbar. The ship was then stuck until the tide changed, (about six hours later). All our captain could do was act like a curmudgeon. He had no sense of humor. He could have joked or told us stories or something.

I had to laugh at myself as I had brought a disco outfit to wear on the islands where we docked at sundown. I must have been thinking of the Caribbean where the islands had entertainment. The islands in Maine were rocks and pine trees with no people inhabiting them.

One saving grace was that we had a great clam and lobster bake on the last night. We dug a pit, filled it with seaweed and had the traditional clambake complete with corn on the cob and baked potatoes.

Shortly after this trip, we bought our own sailboat and that experience has additional horror stories.