

## Chapter One

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### **Welcome, First Mates!**

The Three Phases of Cruising ★ Information You Can Trust  
What's a First Mate?

This book is what I wished I had when, as first-mate aboard *L'Esprit*, I set out to cruise the Pacific Northwest in 2011 with my husband Dave.

At the time, I had very little idea of just how different cruising in the Inside Passage was from anything else I'd experienced in my previous twenty years of cruising the Southern California, Baja, and Chesapeake waters.

On the plus side, what I immediately discovered was that cruising in the PNW is like being an actor in a luscious National Geographic adventure series. Here's why I think that:

You and the Captain can cruise around literally hundreds of drop-dead-gorgeous pine and cedar-covered islands that dot the seas from Washington to British Columbia and Alaska.

A lot of these islands are inhabited full-time, so they have marinas where you can play, get fed, pick up

supplies, use Wi-Fi, and compare notes and adventures with other cruisers.

There're also plenty of uninhabited islands where you can anchor and let your inner Robinson Crusoe come out to play.

The abundance of fish, especially salmon and halibut, as well as crab and prawns, draw a fascinating variety of wildlife to the waters you'll be cruising. You'll be smitten by the many eagles, whales, orcas, bears, otters, seals, and birdlife that go about their daily lives so near your boat.

And, yes, all that fish is available for you to eat if you have the equipment and licenses necessary.

Last, you'll love the vivid sunsets, and the dynamic cloud-filled, Kodachrome blue skies. You'll love the photographs you take. You'll love how the air smells. And hopefully, you'll love your PNW cruising adventure(s).

But, to be frank, compared to cruising in other parts of the world, the PNW is quite like a video game. The waters are filled with things to avoid and obstacles that appear suddenly from the right or the left. You never know what you'll meet in the water or what might spring from behind an island: logs, kayakers, whales, gill netters, ferries, tugs towing barges or log booms, and huge ocean liners.

As a result, there are some things you and the Captain will want to fully understand in order to make safe, comfortable passages:

You'll want to understand and be prepared for conditions that arise when huge amounts of water ebb and flood around thousands of islands: rapids, narrows, whirlpools, standing waves, and copious amounts of logs (water forests!).

The weather will be an active player in your cruising experiences. You'll want to understand it so you can make it your friend.

Going from Washington to Canada and on to SE Alaska, and then back again, requires adjusting to each area's navigation charts and aids, as well as clocks, radio frequencies, and even the phone you use.

You'll have a much more rewarding adventure if you and the Captain arm yourselves with as much knowledge as possible before you set out. When you're cruising in the PNW, ignorance is not bliss.

Which is exactly what this book is for: Giving you the tools to thrive and survive cruising in the Inside Passage waters of the Pacific Northwest.

### **The Three Phases of Cruising**

This book is organized especially to help you, the First Mate, know what you'll mostly likely need to plan for and to know on your cruise, whether it's a one- or two-week charter, or a longer cruise lasting a month or more, and whether you're on a sailboat or a power boat.

It's also organized so you can quickly look up information to jog your memory. There's a lot in here, so I'm guessing there's no way you're going to remember it all. I want to give you the peace of mind that comes from knowing where to get the information and helpful hints you'll need.

This book has three major sections: 1) Planning Your Cruise, 2) Preparing to Cruise, and 3) Enjoying Your Cruise.

At the beginning of each chapter, I'll frame the information you'll be reading about by telling you what motivates me to share the information I do. This usually has to do with safety and comfort, because when those needs are met, enjoying the cruise increases dramatically.

## Planning Your Cruise

These three chapters include the things you'll want to think about and acquire before you seriously think about provisioning your boat and make cruising preparations. These things are:

- Types of Cruising
- Cruising Areas
- Sharing and Organizing the Responsibilities  
(including a helpful list of cruising tasks)

## Preparing to Cruise

These twelve chapters include all the things you'll need to consider when preparing your boat and yourselves for your actual cruise, regardless of whether you're going on a long or short cruise. These chapters deal with preparing yourselves and your boat for the experiences you will encounter and for having a safe and healthy journey. For maximum comfort and safety, attend to these topics BEFORE you leave:

- The Boat Notebook
- Life-preserving and Safety Equipment
- Sound and Light Making Equipment
- The Boat Library
- Provisioning the Galley
- A Healthful, Safe Boat

## The First Mate's Guide to Cruising the Inside Passage

- Cruising Communications (including marine-radio scripts)
- Insurance
- Finances and Mail
- Your Boat's Fluids
- Tool Kits
- Preparing for Customs
- Float Plan

### Enjoying Your Cruise

The last five chapters provide you information, suggestions, and resources to help you drive your boat and to optimize your living conditions while underway. Read them before you leave; utilize them while you're underway.

- Understanding the Waters
- Navigating the Waters (including rules of the road)
- Making Friends with the Weather
- Anchoring (including rafting)
- Docking

At the end of many chapters are suggestions for pages you'll want to include in your Boat Notebook, which I'll explain pretty soon. Templates for many of these pages can be accessed from my website [FirstMatesGuide.com](http://FirstMatesGuide.com).

### **Information You Can Trust**

The advice in this book is gleaned from my own experience and from discussions with many veteran cruisers we've met on our travels, as well as my fellow

seafaring members of Fidalgo Yacht Club, in Anacortes, Washington.

The members of this club are primarily cruisers who venture near and far each spring and summer. I used to joke when I first joined the club that when the weather started warming up, they all headed north. They're a smart and hardy bunch!

Many of these Fidalgo Yacht Club members consider a 250-nautical-mile round trip pretty normal. Collectively, they have an incomparable breadth of knowledge and experience regarding the PNW waters. My husband Dave and I owe them much gratitude for what they have taught us and for the dangers from which they've kept us safe.

In 2016 we were one of five club boats who travelled separately to Alaska, and met up here and there along the way. In 2015 ten club boats made the roundtrip to SE Alaska. An equal number ventured beyond Cape Caution to British Columbia's pristine Central Coast and visited Shearwater and Ocean Falls. As I said, it is a cruising club extraordinaire! I benefitted from their knowledge, and so will you.

### **What's a First Mate?**

While the Captain of your vessel is the one who ultimately assumes responsibility for running the boat, being your vessel's First Mate means you're the ultra-important second-person-in-charge.

And I mean that!

You are second-in-charge, and therefore vitally important. Here's why.

On a cruising boat, the title Captain, like First Mate, does not come with pre-defined jobs. The Captain could be the one who tends to the engine and decides the routes. But not necessarily. I know plenty of cruising couples whose First Mate is the chief navigator or the engine mechanic, while the Captain is the one who does laundry in port or prepares meals.

So be flexible when divvying up the responsibilities.

When dividing up the tasks, figure out which responsibilities work best for you and which work best for the Captain. Factor in each other's strengths and weaknesses when doing this, and be open to changing some roles when needed.

For instance, many crews might think it logical that the First Mate do all the line handling. On our boat, we don't. I'm afraid of the water because of a childhood incident, so my husband Capt. Dave is the one who goes on the forward deck to raise the anchor and coil up the docking lines when we leave port. Despite my fear, I have trained myself to step onto the dock to tie up our boat to the cleats or bull rails.

In chapter four I give a pretty thorough, but general, list of the jobs needing to be divided up. You'll probably discover some that I haven't listed, and you'll probably find there are some that don't apply to your boat. Be sure to refer to that list.

As First Mate and second-in-charge, you'll want to be prepared for three levels of functioning:

- Doing your First-Mate tasks.
- **Relieving the Captain in emergencies.**
- Being a valued Second Opinion.

In order to fulfill these functions, you'll want to build toward having a good sense of:

- When things are going right.
- When things are going wrong, or potentially going wrong.
- Where to look for help.
- What to do to be helpful.
- What the Captain's jobs are and how to do them in case you have to take over in some form.
- How to give your jobs to someone else to do.

### Be prepared for your first-mate's tasks

There's a lot to do on a boat before, during and after a passage. Spreading the load of all those tasks between you and the Captain goes a long way to ease the stress of boating.

On *L'Esprit*, for example, it's Capt. Dave's job to: 1) go through his engine-room inspection check list before we ever turn on our twin Detroits, 2) bring up the anchor or untie the mooring lines, and then 3) coil the lines and bring up the fenders while I prepare to drive the boat away.

My First-Mate jobs while Capt. Dave's busy with his tasks are to make sure everything we need for our passage (charts, electronics, radios, coffee, binoculars, camera, notepad, etc.) are at the helm station and easily accessible during our passage. I also start the engines and make sure all the switches and dials (navigation lights, GPS, auto-pilot, etc.) are in their proper on or off positions.

You might wonder how I do this without messing up. Here's the answer.



I have a Boat Notebook on board, a loose-leaf binder that contains all this information in case I experience a memory lapse. After a winter of non-boating, it amazes me the simple things I forget.

The notebook also includes instructions and drawings that detail Capt. Dave's tasks. I took the time to follow Capt. Dave around and have him describe step-by-step how he does certain boat operations.

I've never regretted the time I took to list how to turn on and off the engines and the generator, or the effort I took to make drawings that show how the electrical panel should look when we're at a dock, at anchorage, and underway. I rarely look at this information, but when I need it, I know where to easily find it.

For example, it's Capt. Dave's job to operate our water maker. Knowing that an emergency could arise while the water-maker's running, I have a page in my notebook detailing how to turn the system on and off. Those instructions and their accompanying diagrams have definitely come in handy a couple of times.

The Boat Notebook is also there for the times we have guests on board who suddenly, because of an emergency, have needed the notebook's information. I know it's ready for them and trust that they'll be able to use the information.

As for the learning curve required to become an adept First-Mate, I say: Be kind to yourself while constantly improving your skills through practice and discussions. The Captain won't do everything perfectly either, if that's a consolation. But you both want the best outcomes. So whenever you think your skills failed you, sit down with

the Captain and talk about ways to become and feel more successful.

Capt. Dave and I often do this after docking maneuvers so we can help each other do our best as a team when docking and undocking *L'Esprit*. For example, because I often have a difficult time grabbing the mid-ship line when docking, Capt. Dave made a special line for me. He rigged a landing line that started at the mid-ship cleat and traveled to the aft where it was held by a cam cleat. That way, when I get off *L'Esprit's* swim step with the stern line, I can easily grab the tail end of the mid-ship line that is now at the stern.

This is just one of a myriad number of examples of how discussing a problem resulted in a working solution and an improvement in my skills.

### Relieve the captain in emergencies

Now for the kicker: The reason I previously described the First Mate as an ultra-important position is that as First Mate, you'll have times when you need to step in for the Captain in an emergency.

Maybe it's as simple as the Captain needing a bathroom break.

Or it's more complicated: the Captain becomes suddenly nauseated, or he gets hurt, or he falls overboard.

That's why even though you may not be the primary navigator or boat driver, you'll need to at least learn how to do those things in case an emergency arises, just as he'll need to know how to do your jobs in case something happens to you.

You'll need to know, for example, how to steer the boat, use the radio to hail help, shut the boat down and start it

up. This book will help you with that. Among other things, it will give you:

- Driving exercises to do to make you feel more competent. (Ch. 19)
- Marine-radio scripts to help you speak with the Coast Guard and other boats, including large ships, as well as with marinas. (Ch. 11)
- A system for organizing a Boat Notebook to easily access needed information. (Ch. 6)

When Capt. Dave and I first started cruising in the PNW, the thought of taking over in an emergency overwhelmed me. Doing so seemed so much easier when we were sailing off the coast of California. But then, the coast of California is not a video game. It's straight forward. It's big and open. There are no logs or narrow passages or suddenly-shallow areas through which to navigate.

Yet I knew that if we were to successfully cruise the PNW waters, I had some learning ahead of me. I had to have some working knowledge of *L'Esprit's* electrical system, and I had to know how to turn on and off the engines and generator and water maker. The rules of the road and speaking radio-talk had to become second nature to me. (Even if you're chartering for a week or two, you'll still want to quickly find the basic rules of the road and the marine-radio scripts in this book.)

Why would I want to know all this?

If something happens to Capt. Dave, our survival depends on me taking over the boat and getting her and us to safety and aid.

I have to admit it took me a while, but I did it. And it wasn't always pretty either.

So, you don't need to know how to do everything perfectly. You just need to know enough to stabilize a difficult situation. You'll improve through practice, and you'll get that practice by taking over tasks. Be the one who calls marinas for slips. Be the one who navigates or drives through narrows. For a First-Mate, knowledge is power, and ignorance is not bliss.

That's why this book has sections that provide: easily adaptable marine-radio scripts, first-aid and ship-traffic information, and suggested publications to have on board for emergency situations.

By the way, I wish you many wonderful sails and no emergency situations.

### **Be the second opinion**

We all make mistakes, even the Captain. Sometimes this is funny, like when he steers the boat in the wrong direction, or he forgets to cleat off a sheet. But sometimes it's not funny at all. He doesn't put out enough scope on the anchor and your boat drags, or he forgets to adjust the time when calculating currents and you find yourself facing water coming against you at seven-knots. Trust me, these things happen.

Because mistakes can cause real problems while cruising, you'll want to learn as much as you can to offer the Captain your valued second opinion. Or at least have the resources to provide helpful second opinions. In this book, you'll learn about weather parameters, current calculation short cuts, and the rules of the road, all of

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which help you in times when questionable situations arise.

You don't have to memorize this information. Just bring this book with you when cruising, and look up information when you need it.