

Boating with Missy

By Melissa Gervais

“I’ve Got This!”



One of the very first times I docked my boat, I was at a very small but social outstation. Just like *Cheers*, everybody knew my name. It was a beautiful flat calm day, so the only obstacles to docking were my nerves and a big case of performance anxiety. There were three friends on the dock to catch my lines, no boats to the bow or stern, no wind, and no current. The docking was slow and uneventful. As everyone walked away, an older curmudgeonly gentleman, across the dock, looked over and said, “You’d think it was a docking of the *Queen Mary*.”

That same summer, I was leaving the outstation, and as I left the mouth of the bay, the steering wheel started spinning like a pinwheel. I opened the hatches to see all of my hydraulic steering fluid splashing around in the bilge. It was late Sunday afternoon, and I had to work Monday morning. I knew that the boat could steer with just the engines; however, I really didn’t think I could. I felt sick in my stomach. I started assessing the situation. It was usually a smooth trip home, no huge hazards, good weather, and a tow would take a big chunk of my rent. There were lots of spots to stop along the way; I had friends heading in the same direction, and people at the marina to catch me. I could do this.

When mechanical issues happen onboard, I always think, “what is my biggest fear? Hands down, being dead in the water. In this situation, I wasn’t technically dead in the water. I had forward motion. I like to think my confidence grew, but I think I was building a bit more resistance to fear. I worked full-time in an office, so it was an accomplishment to get to the boat by 1600 hours on a Friday. My friends had already long gone, so I was usually the last to leave the dock. It was a blustery day, the mechanic had already been down to fix the steering, and I had paid the bill. I was good to go. To leave my slip, I have to turn hard to starboard. As I did, the boat went hard to port and slammed into the dock.

What? Rinse and repeat. Why did this keep happening? I called my mechanic, and he said, “I had a 50% chance of getting that right”. He wouldn’t be able to get to the boat until the following week, so I was grounded. Or was I? Everyone was waiting for me, the boat was packed, and the weather forecast was sunny with a chance of cocktails. I decided to go. I had steering; I just had to remember to

do the opposite. How hard could it be to turn back forty-odd years of left is port and right is starboard? I could do this. Try as I might, for twenty nautical miles, I couldn’t get it right. Or starboard.

As I docked, poorly, one of the old-guard offered his opinion. I wanted to say, “Listen - my steering wheel is on backward,” but thought, “what’s the point?”

Eventually, my biggest fear was realized. On a trip from Lund to “almost” Pender Harbour, the engines sputtered and stopped. The boat had old fashioned gas gauges and, as it turned out, they were quite off. It was later in the evening and many of my friends heard my PAN PAN, which I will never live down. It was windy, the waves were picking up and now it was getting dark. I had to dig deep and stop thinking “what if” because “what if” was happening.

The radio crackled, and I could make out a boat in the distance. I had just enough time to batten the hatches, secure the dog below, pull out the tow line and put fenders on both sides. A wonderful young couple, who were also new to boating, towed me to safety. In the morning, the advice flowed freely on the gas dock, “why didn’t you fill up in Lund?”, “you should get new gauges,” and “how could you not know how much gas you have?” All excellent points.

I recognize that in all of these situations, it is the critic’s “stuff” and not mine. It is not helpful, and I refer to it as “otter nonsense.” Sometimes you need thick skin and a good sense of humor. I believe there is a definite line where your resistance to fear gets to the point that your brain allows your confidence to grow. You learn to get

out of your head and say, “I’ve got this.”

Lots of people have and continue to support me. I will always listen to good advice. Now and then, I hear an unsupportive comment, but I have a cheeky rebuttal. My boat is called *As You Wish*, so I simply throw a towel over the *As* and walk away.

NWY



Thank goodness for our ever-faithful, non-judgemental docking companions.



Missy grew up boating with her family in the Gulf Islands. She works for a yacht services company based in Vancouver, B.C. and boats most weekends from April to October. A self-proclaimed weekend warrior, she enjoys blogging about everything cool for women who boat at missygoesboating.com.