

Boating with Missy

By Melissa Gervais

The Experience of Others

Last week I received an email from a woman who was in the process of buying her first “real” boat, and she wanted some advice. I was reminded of a great quote from historian Jeremy Goldberg who once said, “Courage is knowing it might hurt and doing it anyway. Stupidity is the same. And that’s why life is hard.” I assured her that even though it seemed overwhelming right now, it would be worth it.

For me, buying a boat was a big step. Not only was it a lot of money and responsibility, but I grew up on boats where someone else was always in charge. The first thing I did was sign up for the Power Squadron course. It was here where I learned that I had no idea how much I did not know! I highly recommend these classes, and in most cases, the beginner’s course includes the Restricted Radiotelephone Operator’s Certificate, which is mandatory for anyone using a VHF radio.

The next great piece of advice is to take experienced boaters with you on your first few excursions. I enrolled my friends Kathy and Dave, and we arranged a week-long trip to Princess Louisa in British Columbia so I could practice everything from Alfa to Zulu. I purchased the boat on a Monday, and we arranged to leave the following Thursday. Before leaving, I visited the Army & Navy Department Store and bought every plastic dish, bowl, and utensil I could find. Next up, sheets, comforters, and pillows. Then off to get a cooler, a crab trap and line. This was followed by a trip to Granville Island for charts, super cute boat shoes and any nautical tchotchke I could get my hands on! The amount of stuff that I put on the boat was impressive, but I should have done my homework. Lesson number one: start with the basics.

In the twenty-odd years since that initial shakedown cruise, I have removed most of these original purchases. I don’t like plastic, so I purchased Corelle plates. I like a real wine glass, so I have a quilted box that is strong enough for the worst seas. I perfected what I have on board, how I provision, and the gear that makes my life easier. What works for me may not work for you, but I’d like to share a few of my favorites.

One of my favorite pieces of advice is to make sure everything matches. Green and purple towels on a navy boat are going to make it look messy; whereas a matching blue towel, bucket, throw pillow, and tablecloth makes it look like you made an effort. Always match the dock lines and fenders, never let them drag in the water while you are underway—amateur mistake.

I took measurements of the inside of my fridge and purchased storage containers that fit perfectly. I pre-wash all the vegetables at home before I head out and seal them in containers. They sit side-by-side on the bottom shelf and work as drawers. I also pre-prepare, so instead of taking a jar of Caesar salad dressing, I take enough for one or two meals. By doing this prep in advance, I save water on the boat, and there is less garbage. Also, I got tired of taking a whole head of lettuce for a boat ride!

I also invested in a good five-day ice cooler with wheels on the back so I could put my waterproof Gill overnight bag on the top, which resulted in not needing a dock cart and make an extra trip. I also purchased inexpensive, dollar store containers that fit exactly in my downstairs freezer so I can make two large ice-blocks for the cooler while I’m on shore power. I save money by not buying blocks on the dock, and it is one less item to carry to the boat.

I like to do my hair and some minimal makeup if I am heading to a dock party, so I bought a train case with a pop-up mirror that holds my hairdryer (with a retractable cord), folding brush, and makeup. It stows away nicely and keeps everything neatly organized. The other time-saving tip is to buy two of everything. Toothpaste, hairspray, eyelash curler, you name it—one for the house and one for the boat. I even have a second-hand laptop and DSLR camera with a telephoto lens that I leave on the boat. It is incredible how often I use both and can simply save my pictures to

an SD card or the cloud. Again, less stuff to pack to the boat.

Another item that I can’t live without is my battery monitor. I use anywhere from 125 to 150 amp-hours per day; my house bank has four AGM batteries that store a total of 600-amp hours of battery power at 12 VDC. To extend their life expectancy, I only deplete them to 50%, which means, I have 300 usable amp-hours (or approximately two days) before running the generator. I could not manage this without a battery monitor.

Of course, the best items are recommendations from friends such as freeze-dried hash browns, single-serving rosé, solar tea lights, a good knife, odor-free dishcloths, floating sunglasses, a waterproof Bluetooth speaker, and Zaal Noflex digester for the head. I could go on, but you get the idea. Please send me your recommendations, and I will make sure to share them. See you on the water!



Kathy, Dave, Missy, and Kennedy on that long ago trip to Princess Louisa inlet.



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.