

# THE HOULIHAN NAVY —

In many families, as siblings grow up and venture out into the wider world, their careers and recreational pursuits diverge, leaving them with little in common. But that's not the case with Maureen, Bill and Chuck Houlihan of San Diego. Although sailing wasn't an activity they shared as kids, as adults they each



In recent years, Maureen and Buzz have done most of their cruising in the waters of Panama and Ecuador.

evolved a passion for messing about in sailboats and exploring the world from a waterborne perspective. Even though they normally travel independently of one another, their sailing adventures over the years have been reciprocally inspiring.

For the past few years Maureen — 'Mo' — and her husband Buzz Hathaway have been cruising the waters of Panama and Ecuador aboard their Catalina 34 *Encore*. When we caught up with them at the Balboa YC last winter we realized that we knew Mo's 'baby' brother Chuck. Based at La Paz aboard his Allied 39 sloop *Jacaranda*, he and his partner Linda Edeiken are well known in the Mexican cruising community, partly because they serve as moderators for the popular Southbound and Pacific Puddle Jump cruiser groups at *Yahoo.com*.

"Well, you probably know my other brother, Bill, too," said Mo. "He's done the Baja Ha-Ha Rally twice aboard his Lagoon 410 *Sun Baby*." *Sun Baby*? Sure, we knew *Sun Baby*. In fact, we'd just crossed paths with Bill and his wife Sue a few months earlier in Banderas Bay.

That conversation inspired us to dig a little deeper into the experiences of this California cruising clan in hopes that their insights and advice might kick-start your own cruising adventures.

These days all three siblings are members of yacht clubs in San Diego

(Mo's with Southwestern YC, Bill's with San Diego YC, and Chuck's with Silvergate YC). But none of them grew up around yc junior programs, nor did they have structured sailing lessons of any kind. They each just discovered their shared passion by happenstance.

For Mo, who's now 72, the inspiration to give sailing a try didn't come until adulthood. While living in Hawaii, she became intrigued by the sailboats she'd see plying coastal waters, and one day someone offered her a ride. Later, back in San Diego she took a few lessons, then tagged along on some Wednesday night beer can races. One of the friends she met racing was setting up a 55-footer to take down to the Virgin Islands as a charterboat. "He asked if I'd be interested in coming along as cook," she recalls. "I laughed and said no, but a few nights later I woke in the night and thought 'Why couldn't I do that?'" As you've probably already guessed, that chance offer totally changed her life.

The year was 1972, and crewed charter yachts ruled the roost in the Virgin Islands, as the bareboat charter concept was only in its infancy. In fact, the whole V.I. fleet was miniscule compared to the scene there today, so all the charter crews got to know each other quickly.

It was at the now-famous thatched-roofed hut called Foxy's Tamarind Bar on Jost Van Dkye that Mo met Buzz, who was the charter captain of an 80-ft Rhodes motorsailer named *Kanaloa*. Turned out he was also from San Diego. As every Caribbean sailing veteran knows, this wasn't the only romance kindled at that fabulously funky watering hole. At the

*"I eventually became crew on my friend's brother's 'big boat', a Cal 24."*

end of that season Mo and Buzz sailed *Kanaloa* up to New York via Bermuda, thus beginning 40 years of adventuring together.

Unlike Maureen, Buzz started sailing as a kid, first aboard a Sabot at a Sea Scout summer camp, then later aboard rented Lido 14s on Mission Bay. "I eventually became crew on my friend's brother's *big boat*, a Cal 24. I raced out of Oceanside and did several big and little Ensenada Races when I was young." Later, he raced for several years with Bob

Oldham, aboard the Ericson 41 *Valerie*, including doing two TransPacs.

By profession, Buzz, now 69, was a computer programmer for the aerospace industry, but he fell into delivering boats in the early '70s, and we suspect he found that to be a lot more fun. "My first delivery was from Tahiti to Hawaii to San Diego aboard a 50-ft ketch, built in the 1920s, that had no radio. I navigated by sextant and we hand-steered." She nearly sank on the way home, necessitating a stop in Honolulu, but they eventually arrived on the mainland, just four days before the start of the '71 TransPac. "That was hardly enough time to do the laundry before hopping on *Valerie* and racing back to Honolulu." Afterward, he delivered the same boat back to San Diego, which was the first of many offshore deliveries. "Once, (Maureen's brother) Bill joined me on a too-late-in-the-season trip from Hawaii on a Cal 48; it was cold and wet, but fast." Several deliveries on the East Coast led to his gig on the big Rhodes, when he met Maureen.

Bill, the middle Houlihan, a year younger than Mo, told us his first day of sailing — 57 years ago — was a classic San Francisco Bay experience: A friend from school invited him along for a sail aboard the family Bear Boat, *Threadbear*. Later, the same family invited him out on the 35-ft cutter *Lana Kila*. "Both of these wonderful daysails captured my imagination and thrilled me," he recalls.

But for Bill 'life' intervened, and it wasn't until many years later that he and his wife Sue bought their first boat (of many), an old wooden Snipe that had been built in Sausalito in the late '40s. "After some initial struggles understanding sailing with a centerboard, and the employment of some colorful language on my part, we had a



# TIPS & TALES FROM SAILING SIBLINGS



**Linda and Chuck show their appreciation for the wonderful life they've lived while cruising by volunteering as net controllers and more.**

wonderful time sailing it in San Diego and Mission bays." It was many years later, though, that he and Sue finally got their chance to cruise south.

By contrast, Chuck, who is 13 years younger than Bill, had the good fortune of growing up in a Mission Bay neighborhood where he had easy access to watersports. "In 1965, when I was 12, my family moved to San Diego's Mission Bay and we lived within a block of the water. Maureen and Bill were out of the house by then." A neighborhood friend

**Bill and Sue don't have as many blue water miles under their belts as the others do, but they traveled on a fancier boat: 'Sun Baby' (below).**



named Jim Tank had a (12-ft) Penguin that the two pals sailed all over Mission Bay. "It was a great time and a good learning experience," he recalls. And we'd bet those carefree days helped fuel his future wanderlust.

After finishing high school, Chuck, now 58, traveled the world for several years — starting in '75 — living and working in Norway, Denmark, Italy, American Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. "It was in New Zealand that I gained much of my sailing and racing experience, which I built on when I returned to San Diego."

In Auckland, three years into his travels, he met a paraplegic sailor named Robbie Coleman who became his mentor. Robbie had an old sloop named *Mavis* that he'd sailed out from England; a classic woodie built in 1897!

"Robbie sailed the heck out of that boat. He was a fine yachtsman who was very involved with racing, and was also a surveyor. He took me under his wing and taught me how to sail, race and navigate," Chuck recalls. They were sometimes on the water 4-5 days a week and did short stints of cruising during the summer months. "He told me, 'When you're in a dicey situation imagine you're in a pub with a friend. He is telling you

— such as when clearing out of an anchorage at night when we are on a lee shore with the wind building."

In 1978, while Chuck was still vagabonding around New Zealand and Australia, Mo and Buzz took off on their first big cruise to Mexico and the South Pacific aboard *Gambit*, a Lapworth 36 that Buzz had bought in '68. She'd been built in 1959 of strip-planked mahogany as a fast racer. The plan was to spend two

*"Then came the hardest thing we ever did: re-entry!"*

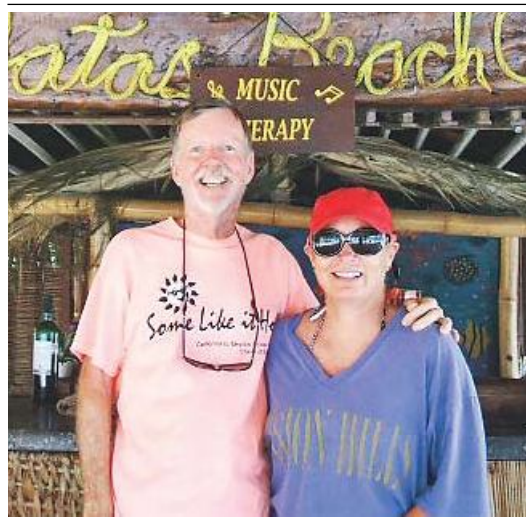
or three years in the South Pacific, then return home. But as is typical of world cruisers, their two-year plan extended to nine.

"We explored one island at a time until we got to Australia," remembers Mo, "and there we decided it was easier to keep heading west. Each year we decided where we would spend the next cyclone season. After five years in the South Pacific, we crossed the Indian Ocean, and spent a couple of years in the Mediterranean (via the Red Sea). We continued west via Gibraltar and the Eastern Caribbean, where we returned to the scene of the crime: Foxy's.

"We sailed down the islands to Venezuela and through Panama, then spent a year getting up the West Coast to San Diego ('87). Then came the hardest thing we ever did: re-entry!" One thing that made being back in the rat race tolerable was that they set a 10-year target for going cruising again. It took 20, though. But finally, in 2007, having both retired, they headed south again, this time on their 1988 Catalina 34 *Encore*.

Mo and Buzz were a couple of years into their first trip when Chuck flew to Fiji to join *Gambit* and sample full-immersion cruising. (He was living in Australia at the time.) Chuck made several long crossings with his sister and Buzz and lived aboard *Gambit* for six months in American Samoa while they went home to work.

After finally returning to San Diego, Chuck bought *Jacaranda* in 1986 and began cruising and racing her locally. Seven years later he set off on his own



the exact story (of your current situation). What advice would you give your friend?' I have used this many times in my mind to put a situation in perspective

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**Having owned 'Jacaranda' for 26 years Chuck knows her intimately from stem to stern. He and Linda now keep her in Mexico all year.**

extended cruise, which took him on a circuit of the South Pacific. "I was cruising on a very limited budget, averaging about \$450 a month."

In '98 he and Linda began cruising together, primarily in Southern California, until they departed for Mexico in '05. Looking back, Linda credits a family bareboat charter in the British Virgin Islands in '72 with first igniting her passion for sailing and cruising. And she sees her dad, Stan, as her role model for her current liveaboard lifestyle. After his youngest child went off to college, "he followed his dream, sold his medical practice, bought a sailboat and went cruising in the Caribbean with Mom for two years."

**B**y 2008 all three Houlihans and their mates were out cruising — although rarely, if ever, together. We asked each of them to draw on their substantial experience and share some insights:

## What were some highlights?

*Mo & Buzz:* "We especially liked the Western Pacific islands — Vanuatu, the Solomons, and Papua New Guinea — mostly because of good diving and very interesting cultures. We loved Turkey, where we stayed a year enjoying the very nice cruising and wonderful people. We liked places where a boat is useful rather than an inconvenience. Mexico and Turkey were among our favorites in that regard.

"Other fond memories: the people of the Marquesas, and the stunning beauty of all of French Polynesia, where Bill and Sue visited us; the Cook Islands, where we saw the fastest dancers in the South Pacific; the incredible singing in Tonga; Vanuatu, where we attended a

pig-killing ceremony, and drank kava in the men's hut; the hospitality of the Australians; the peaceful atmosphere of Bali; snorkeling and bargaining in the Red Sea; Egypt's pyramids and the Valley of the Kings at Luxor; the North African coast; and never having to change sails on the Atlantic crossing."

*Chuck:* "Our four summers in the Sea of Cortez were hot, but the wildlife, scenery and fishing made it really special. Visiting the Revillagigedos Islands, 250 miles off the coast of southern Baja, has been the highlight of Mexico so far. Being able to swim with — and ride — the giant manta rays and experience the marine wilderness was incredible. We spent two-and-a-half months there over two winters. (Ed. note: See Chuck's *Revillagigedos Second Time Cruiser Guide* in the Yahoo Southbound group Files section.)

"In the South Pacific, highlights were Tikopia (Solomons), Tuvalu and Kiribati. In Kiribati we obtained permission to visit the southern islands after checking out. A supply vessel captain gave me his charts to trace and spent some time with me talking about the various entrances to the southern island group. I think I was only the fifth boat to pass through that season.

"The famous Queen's Birthday Storm in '94 will always be remembered. *Jacaranda* came through like a champ, but at times we needed snorkels, and it felt like we were in a submarine!

"During the time Linda and I have cruised together, the highlight has been the people we meet along the way that mean the most to us — both the locals and other cruisers."

*Bill:* "Our favorite places are anchorages, with or without friends, in the Sea of Cortez. One of the significant things about the Sea is the solitary situations we found ourselves in. Often we were the only boat in the anchorage and the silence was beautiful. I was swimming early one morning in El Cardonal on Isla Partida and about 100 yards from the boat I stopped and just looked around. I was startled by the silence. There was no sound whatsoever. It was stunning to me at the time, and it stayed with me when I returned to the States and the incredibly noisy environment we live in.

"Other favorites are: La Paz, La Cruz,

and Zihautanejo. Our preference was to stay at a place for a few weeks to get to know the neighborhood and some of the people. In that regard, the above towns topped our list."

## What changes have you observed in the cruising community?

*Mo & Buzz:* "A big change we notice is how many more boats are cruising these days. About fifteen boats were in all of the Marquesas Islands when we were there in 1978. Also, the cruisers have grown noticeably older.

"The boats are much bigger. But with all the new sail-handling equipment, they can be safely crewed with fewer, less agile, and graying people, up to a limit. The population of kid boats is much larger too.

"Navigation and electronics are light years ahead. We had a sextant for our first five years. Self-steering wind vanes are fewer; before they were essential. If you're crossing an ocean without a vane you should have a large crew or two adequate autopilots.

"Years ago almost all cruisers had Ham radios with manual antenna tuners. It required proficiency in Morse Code and radio theory. Our Ham radio was wonderful for keeping contact with other cruisers, and getting telephone patches with stateside Hams to call our families. Today the FCC has relaxed the requirements for a license. Some of today's radios are FCC approved for both SSB and Ham.

"Charging systems are astronomically bigger. We cruised for nine years with a 35-amp alternator and two 12-volt car batteries (for house and starting). Today, high-output alternators, solar panels and wind generators are charging large banks of deep-cycle, new-technology batteries.

"Back then we were quite typical with a manual windlass for our 300 feet of chain, non-self-tailing winches, seven hank-on head sails, symmetrical spinnaker without a sock,



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and engine-driven freezer which required daily engine running. And, of course, no computer."

**Chuck:** "The boats have sure gotten bigger and carry more toys since cruising with *Gambit* in the '70s. Plus, so many more folks are out cruising now. Weather forecasting is much better and on-board communication has leaped ahead with on-board email."

## What's your cruising philosophy?

**Mo & Buzz:** "It's the same as our philosophy ashore: Treat others as you would like to be treated, and remember you're a guest in their country. We have all arrived someplace where a preceding boat has left a bad impression. Don't let it be us."

"We follow the 20-20 rule. We stay between 20° north and 20° south unless a continent gets in our way — and we'll keep going as long as we're having fun."

**Bill & Sue:** "Our cruising philosophy is quite simple. Do no harm; treat the Mexican people well; spend *pesos* where we can and when we can afford to; make numerous new friends (the easiest thing

*The marine railway at the Balboa YC may be funky, but it's functional and convenient. 'Encore' awaits a fresh coat of bottom paint.*

in the world in Mexico); and love the life we're living."

**Chuck & Linda:** "We are strong believers in leaving a clean wake. Think of the people coming behind you and how your actions might influence their stay. We try really hard to follow the rules and respect the customs of the host country."

"We like to get off the beaten path. In the South Pacific I was able to visit islands that had not had a cruising boat stop there as long as the people could remember."

"Both of us feel very strongly about paying back to the cruising community that has treated us so well for all these years. One of the ways we do that is by doing various net control responsibilities — Pacific Seafarers Net, Sonrisa Net, Amigo Net, Southbound Net — and working as moderators on both the Yahoo Puddle Jump Group and the Yahoo Southbound Group. We've also given a number of seminars for the Puddle Jump group in Puerto Vallarta."

## Advice for future cruisers?

**Mo and Buzz:** "Don't be embarrassed. Everyone was new (to cruising) at some point. You don't have to have a lot of cruising experience to leave, but you do need to know your boat — how to sail her



*Scuba diving is a fun hobby that also has practical applications. Buzz holds a clump of fishing net that had been fouling 'Encore's prop.*

— and have your sails and mechanical systems in order.

"If you are jumping now, know how to do the basic maintenance. Don't skimp on spares or tools. If you don't know how to repair something, bring along the spares and special tools. You probably won't have everything perfect or even installed; that's not necessary. If your schedule permits, as it should, there will be time later. As has been said, 'Cruising is working on your boat in exotic places.' An infinite amount of learning material is available. Lots of manufacturers and suppliers have websites and forums to share ideas and information."

"Never rely on one person's opinion. Better-prepared people have less chance of having broken dreams."

**Chuck & Linda:** "You don't need all the bells and whistles to cruise. We meet people who are virtually traveling marine stores, loaded down with lots of items they don't use."

"Mexico is the best for gaining experience. It's very easy cruising. Mostly sand or mud anchorages, and wonderful for getting your confidence level up. Cruise the boat for a year in Mexico without putting a lot of gear on it, then head back to the States and outfit her for long-distance sailing. By then you will know what works and what doesn't work."

"Buy the biggest ground tackle you can afford — oversized! We are constantly amazed at the light ground tackle we see on so many first-time cruising boats."

"This sounds nutty but it's very helpful to know how to sail. Don't laugh, we meet people all the time who have just gone out and turned left! Our suggestion is to race. Join a race boat as crew. Walk the docks on race day asking people if they need crew. Bring a smile and a willingness to jump in and help, and be honest with your experience level. Then after you've gained some experience,



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start racing your boat. It will make you a much better sailor, and having an understanding of what it takes to make the boat go is so helpful when you're cruising.

"It always amazes us how many people we know who motor most of the time in Mexico. Those who say, 'We motor a lot because there is no wind,' should talk to us! Especially in the Sea of Cortez we found the sailing fantastic. For example: Get up at 4 a.m. and ride the Coromuel from La Paz to Isla San Francisco. We have done that at least five times and it has worked great. Boats that leave at 10 a.m. end up motoring all the way."

**Bill & Sue:** "Our advice for wannabes is the same that *Latitude 38* has been giving all along: 'Go, and go now.' And although the boat must be prepared as with any offshore trip, you can go for a short time. We had an acquaintance who had about six weeks off, so he and his wife headed south, did some surfing, saw some of the Sea, and headed back home. It doesn't need to be a full-time commitment. And it can be as inexpensive as one wants."

"We have seen families and wished we had made one of these trips when our kids were young. All the kids seemed to be having a great time and they conversed easily with adults, often sitting in the cockpit while the adults were talking."

*"Our advice for wannabes is the same that 'Latitude 38' has been giving all along: 'Go, and go now.'"*

It would be the most significant thing one could do with their kids. It will affect them for life. Cruising parents and kids seem closer than we generally see in the U.S."

#### Final thoughts?

**Mo & Buzz:** "Some sayings make sense when not taken to the extreme, such as 'Go simple, go now,' and 'There are those who leave unprepared, and those who never leave.'"

**Bill & Sue:** "One thing that I really

didn't like about Mexico was 'ugly Americans'; cruisers who work the system by filling up with marina water without paying for it or sneaking into marina showers without paying the required fee."

**Chuck:** "I must say that I learned a heck of a lot from Mo and Buzz over the years. Buzz has spent so many years sailing and working as a charter captain that I really pay attention when he starts talking. The worse the conditions, the calmer he becomes, until there's a point you have to say, 'For God's sake Buzz, will you speak up?'"

We're not surprised. Aboard sailboats, it's often the most capable and confident sailors who are the calmest. Think of the *screamers* you've encountered out cruising or on a race course and you'll realize that the opposite is also true!

Having gotten to know this family a bit, we'd have a hard time imagining any of them hollering in a panic or coveting the spotlight. Instead, they've quietly lived adventures lifestyles that we hope some readers can emulate.

— **latitude/andy**

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