CONTENTS

1. The Sojourn 1
2. Looking Back, Looking Forward 5
3. Time to Adjust 13
4. Cutting the Cord 15
5. Madness and Art 19
6. A Heavy-hearted Return to Land: 'Stuff' does not Provide Joy 29
7. Alana Rose 33
8. It's All in the Stars 35
9. Cutting the Emotional Cord of Materialism 43
10. Crashing 49
11. Lady Musgrave 55
12. Sailors Know That They Are Already There 57
13. Home Ain't a Thing 67
14. An Unexpected Journey 71
15. The Sea Me 79
16. The Peaks and Troughs of Transitions 85
17. Entering the Whirlpool 93
18. Changing Places 103
19. Saltwater is my DNA 107
20. A Change of Plan 117
21. I Never Really Left 121
22. Home is Changing 129
23. On Land, With Uncertainty 133
24. Living Life Sideways 141

About the Contributors 149
Acknowledgments 159

INTRODUCTION

When we called for stories from women on the water for this anthology, we expected accounts of trepidation as family homes were sold and precious possessions parted with or placed into storage. After all, the sailing forums and social media communities are full of posts from women anxiously seeking advice about leaving home to follow their partner's dream of a life on the water. What we did not expect was the depth of feeling and sense of loss from those who are back on shore after time spent living aboard and cruising on sailboats.

When contemplating or preparing for a life on the water, practical issues are usually foremost. Setting the boat up for long term sailing, preparing for rough weather, sea survival courses, and so on. Little thought is given to emotional issues such as a sense of loss of 'place' until the time comes, and, while possibly a generalisation, it does appear that women are more affected by leaving the family home than their male partners.

While the concepts of 'attachment to place', 'sense of place', and 'loss of place' are well documented within the scholarly field of human geography, attachment to 'blue space' is less well understood. This anthology highlights that attachment and loss of place are not confined to terrestrial dwellers. It's just that 'place' to cruising folk is more fluid (in more ways than one!).

In simple terms 'attachment to place' can be considered the bonding of people to places, or a space to which meaning has been ascribed. There is a plethora of academic research devoted to this topic. Attachment to place is generally recognised as *being to a specific location*, perhaps a town, or quite commonly, a family home. Loss can be experienced through natural disaster or forced relocation.

The desire to live close to water has been well documented, however what of the desire to live *on* the water?

What is the appeal for those living and travelling long term on boats? Is it a changing vista without leaving home? Is it attachment to the boat itself? Or is it the seascape? None are particularly static as people regularly change boats and/or cruising locations. Despite this, an attachment still exists.

Many of these stories accentuate this connection to the water that pulls us back, despite cramped spaces, a lack of privacy and home comforts, distance from friends and family, fear, and the ever-present, very real danger that faces us every day we are out there on the water.

While for some, the discovery that life on the ocean waves is not for them, others are permanently changed. Life becomes simpler, decisions are dominated by the weather or tide, plans are written in the sand at low tide. A transition back to land life afterwards can be a wrench and a shock to the senses. This collection hopes to emphasise to those taking to the water for the first time or those returning reluctantly, you are not alone. We hope you draw some comfort from these stories.

While the stories have been written by women, this topic is not gender specific. Nor is it age specific as our contributors range from teenagers to grandmothers.

Given the diversity of our writers (and their locations) we've chosen to leave the women's own voices and kept the localised spelling to underline the flavour of our international contributions.

We thank all the women who have opened their hearts and shared their experiences with us.

Shelley Wright and Jackie Parry.

1

THE SOJOURN

DEB AKEY

The light is working the edge of the blinds, teasing my consciousness. I drift in the fuzz of awakening, pulling the covers over my eyes to offer a moment's respite. As the sun pushes on, a shaft of light penetrates, an array of alternating gold and shadow displaying across the bed and up the wall. The fuzz is fading slowly and, as I open my eyes, I'm struggling to make sense of the sensory input, but it's wrong somehow and my mind can't process it in this sleepy state. At last, fully awake, it dawns on me that the light is still, flat. Missing is the flicker of the sun's reflection off the little wavelets of the anchorage water early in the morning before the sea breeze has kicked in. I used to lie in the comfort of our v-berth as I woke and watched the light dance across the headliner in tandem with the boat's motion – playful, almost impish – and it always made me smile, but this morning the memory makes me sad, and maybe just a touch angry.

They said it would be easy. No, that's not quite right. They *implied* it would be easy, this cruising life. Cruising magazines abound with glossy photographs of beautiful crystalline beaches, turquoise water, sundowners, and sunshine, lined the booths at the boat shows. Online forums and bloggers touted the ability to

do it all on a thousand a month. Retiring a few years early, we cast off the dock lines with a fully equipped cruising boat, a healthy cash savings account and retirement investments we hoped would last as long as we did. They didn't. Unexpected medical bills, unexpected boat maintenance, and higher costs of living drew on dwindling funds. It became readily apparent that a thousand a month might work for some but cruising the East Coast and Bahamas would demand two to three times that for us.

We did get to walk those crystalline beaches and swim in turquoise water. We had perfect sails through scenery more stunning than one could imagine. We shared sundowners with some of the most amazing people we've ever met, forming deep friendships that will last a lifetime. But a substantial portion of our five years on the boat was spent on docks while working in boatyards replenishing the cruising kitty. Toward the end of 2018 we realized that cobbling together income from boatyard jobs along the way just wasn't going to cut it. We needed a substantial influx of cash if we were going to continue, and that meant a sojourn to land for a while.

It happened fast after that, a whirlwind of activity to get my husband to his new job, to find somewhere to live and some way to get there, to prep the boat for sale. Emotions tumbled over us with no time to process them and were shoved into the corners. Gradually the moving to-do list was completed, the pace slowed to a crawl and those emotions flushed back in unexpected waves.

The range of emotions was astounding. There was anger that the cruising lifestyle had been poorly represented. The anger was muted, though, dulled by the years since we'd left and the passing of time that allowed us to gradually deal with the reality versus the expectations.

There was sadness at leaving our dolphin friends behind.

There was, on the other side of the pendulum, joy that we were going to be able to spend time with the grandchildren here whom we'd only seen on quick holiday visits. There was fear of

not being able to face this challenge. And there was grief in the same way you experience the death of a loved one.

Cruising isn't something that you just go do. It's a relationship. With the vessel that is your home, with the weather that rules your every moment, with the creatures with whom you share your environment, with the fellow travelers you meet along the way, and with the endless expanse of ever-changing sea that holds you. And, just like the loss of a loved one, the grief you feel when you leave the sea is very real.

We're luckier than most, because a job fell in our lap just when we needed it. Not everyone is that fortunate. We found a tiny studio just a few square feet bigger than the boat so we don't accumulate clutter, we found a decent car, we live in a place where we can still walk to most of what we need, and seven of our eleven grandchildren are within shouting distance. I tell myself I'm blessed, no, that's not quite right either. I am blessed, but the grief process will take time to run its course. For just a bit I'll allow myself to wallow in the disappointment and pain of leaving this lifestyle that has meant so much to me. But the experiences of the last five years have helped me to be grounded in such a way that I've learned to roll with the punches, and to appreciate what each moment has to offer, even if it's the stark city skyline against the reds of the sunset instead of palm trees, or the unusually warm St. Louis January day to turn my face towards. I've experienced the kindness of strangers in the cruising community and have it to share in abundance with those here who haven't. And I have an abundance of stories to share with my family.

It will take work, but friendships will be found in this concrete jungle. It will take determination not to wish this time away on our journey toward our next boat. It will take time, but eventually the muted traffic noise beyond my window will become the sound of waves washing over the sand as I drift off to sleep, dreaming of the sea calling.

2

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

SANDI YORK

My son's eyes slammed shut in a tight squint that drew his cheeks back like a slingshot. His jaw crushed together his already ground-down baby teeth. His head started shaking back and forth, and a sound like a sickly car engine looking for a higher gear emanated from his gritted teeth. It was a sound that meant that he was over the edge. A sound that repeatedly brought on that heavy feeling behind my eyes and that always fed the growing stone in my nervous stomach. I put my hand gently on his back, trying to hide my resentment and hoping that only gentleness would be spoken in my touch.

"I don't want to be touched!" he dictated as he lurched away from my hand. Then more quietly, "So many people pet my head every day that I don't want to be touched by anyone."

Dylan's blonde Dennis-the-Menace hair was an attractant to all passers-by on Mexico's crumbling sidewalks and dusty streets. And beneath that platinum hair, brightening by the day under the scorching sun, his deep brown eyes and full lips gave him a stunning look that brought on comments of admiration even from those who didn't give his head a quick ruffle. But he and I both knew that occasional hair ruffling was merely an easy scapegoat.

He bolted to his berth in the forward cabin of our 40-foot ketch and wrapped himself up in his oversized fleece blanket known as Daddy Blanket. He snatched up Whaley – a well-loved, scruffy orca whale with multicolored stitches and a missing pectoral fin – and made loud whale squeaks as he pressed the worn whale to his lips. Gradually the intense squeaking became cooing, and he cooed and rocked, cooed and rocked, until his breathing became slower and his eyes calmer.

"Dylan," I tried cautiously, "Can you tell me what's bothering you?"

"Why can't we go back to the blue house? I miss my toys and my cozy hiding places! I want to go pretend-camping with Andy under the porch! I miss trees." He paused, his face scrunched up and lips quivering. "Why do we have to do this trip for four years?" His voice cracked, and he buried his teary cheeks in Daddy Blanket.

I didn't have a response. I was asking the same question silently to myself. My mind ran through all the things I wanted to say but didn't: I don't know why we have to do this for four years. I don't know why I gave up a professional career to opt for constantly cleaning, wiping bottoms, and teaching two kids who don't want to be taught. I don't know why we left our friends and our families behind. I don't know why I willingly chose to spend twenty-four/seven with two young kids on a small boat.

"Because there is so much of the world to see, and it will take us a long time to get around the Pacific," I replied, badly faking pep and optimism. "Think of all the things you get to do here that you don't get to do at home – swimming, snorkeling, seeing sea turtles and sting rays and whales. Okay, maybe you get to see whales at home, too, but isn't it cool that we have gotten to see the same whales all the way down the coast?"

Silence.

I withdrew, gave him his space, and unlocked the gates holding back the heavy tears behind my eyes. Again.

We had traveled 3,300 nautical miles in seven months, out

of Washington, north into British Columbia, and then south to the Sea of Cortez. It was a picture-perfect, Facebook-worthy family adventure story if you didn't zoom in on the details. We did not start our journey on a high note; the very first night was definitively the worst of our entire voyage. We tripped over each other and all the boxes and bags of stuff we didn't need. The kids, drunk on overwhelm and fatigue, whirled around in tornado circles. Tom, drunk on overwhelm and strong rum, fell into a sailor's stupor. I cried myself to sleep as we rocked gently on our mooring and listened to the patter of northwest spring rain on our deck. There were weeks of yelling and apologies, of reminders and praise, of wondering how many buttons three and five-year-old children could press in a day.

The children eventually became accustomed to the new rhythm and rules, and we eventually got used to each other. In time, we managed to find our footing and learned how to walk the narrow tight-rope of traveling family togetherness. As we moved north into denser forests and wilder waters, we felt more at ease. In the steep fjords and rocky shoreline of Vancouver Island's west coast, we found a rhythm and rhyme in our days and a brief taste of the idyllic cruising life we had naively envisioned. The moment we rounded Cape Scott with its dancing waves, both kids drugged with seasickness medicine and Tom and I white-knuckled guiding our bouncing boat through the confused swell, we encountered a wild and thrilling coast, scarce in people and rich in imaginative possibilities.

Dylan thrived in the wilderness. He threw his small body down on the fine sand beaches and rolled around like a puppy. He ran through forest trails, climbed up rope ladders, transformed downed trees into spaceships, hunted sand-dollars, and turned driftwood into race cars. Andy toddled along after him, following big brother's every move. We all breathed more deeply away from the pressures and expectations of traditional life. The tall fjords around us dwarfed our petty worries, and the humpback whales breaching and splashing down that wild coast

turned our attention to the magnificence of the ocean and away from our microcosm of dysfunction.

The end of those magic weeks on the west side of Vancouver Island came to an end as summer drew to a fast close and the continental coast blasted its last call. The further south we got; the more chaotic life became. The further south we got, the less familiar our surroundings were. Bluffs topped with towering mansions, sports cars in marina parking lots, and polished chrome and blue underwater lights on bling pleasure boats. And it got hot. The hotter it got, the less patience we had. The less patience we had, the more the kids contrived to get a rise out of us. Malice, mischief, and desperation emanating from their child eyes.

We had done our best to read the kids stories every night, a practice that would have been relaxing except for my desperation to finish the books so I could drag my exhausted brain and body to bed every night. Still, pleas for "one more book" were usually heeded and sometimes even resulted in pour-out-your-soul conversations. We made sure we went hiking and exploring and low-tide dinghy cruises to feed the kids' wonder and their souls. We talked about what we were doing and what we were planning and showed them maps and pictures. We tried to have a modicum of stability. But the long and the short of it was that we had upended their world. We had taken them out of their known world of schedules, school, and personal space and shoved them into a 40-foot boat with a 360-degree moat.

And we still had the long leap down the Baja Coast ahead of us. We spent six rough nights at anchor and six rolly nights underway. The now-four-year-old Andy glowed in the rhythm of the waves and marveled at the size of the swell. He was no worse for wear after those long days and nights at sea. But Dylan – "son of the sea" in the Welsh language of his Swansea-raised grandfather – was pulled down into a deep funk. He wasn't new to intensity or mood swings. He had been intense from the moment of his birth, giving me a long, wrenching labor and

lifting his head to look around the moment he was put bloody and sticky on my swollen belly. He was the child who lined up all the hot wheels in a six-foot path, who would not tolerate being set down as an infant, who spoke early and clearly, and who defied every direction a baby how-to book might give. He was always observant, always intense, and never ever easy. And the strong steep waves off the Baja Coast only fed the intensity and anxiety in this wild six-year-old, who couldn't stop turning circles, grinding his teeth to powder, and chewing his shirts to shreds.

Exhausted, we left the boat in La Paz and boarded a bus north to Loreto, where my parents awaited us. Christmas passed in a blur through my tears. Every day saw Dylan alternate between four states: swimming in pure joy, leaping and diving like the orca whale of his spirit; pouting and stewing under Daddy Blanket; clinging to me to like a limpet and repeating "Mommy, mommy, mommy" over and over again long after it was endearing; and running circles with his eyes closed and teeth gritted. My mom looked at me with shocked and sympathetic eyes, wondering what had happened to the spunky boy she had last seen. "I hate this trip!" Dylan screamed each day, knowing full well that it would bring anger and hurt and sadness to me.

And the worst thing was that I wanted nothing more than exactly what he did: to go home. Home, where we were surrounded by shady trees, where we had friends, where we knew who we were.

It was a homesickness I had never experienced before. I had started my dash across the world aged 17, chasing dreams and languages and opportunities wherever they arose. I had found cheap tickets to China, jobs in Central Europe, internships in Vietnam, and frequent flyer miles to Australia. My homesickness had always been the dull pain of missing friends and family, the slight uneasiness of always being a foreigner. But this homesickness was new. This loss of identity. This worry that

there was something wrong with my son. This desperation of resource lessness and helplessness.

"I don't know how much longer I can do this," I whispered to my husband late one night, both of us full of beer and raw emotion, as we sat on the stiff couch of my parents' condo. My knees were pulled up to my chest, arms wrapped tightly around my legs.

"Here we are, thousands of miles from home, with a kid who clearly has some sort of diagnose-able disorder. What if it's autism, or Asperger's, or ADHD, or Sensory Processing Disorder?"

"It's not autism," Tom reminded me again, his back hunched, and his eyes focused on something on the floor. "It doesn't really matter what's going on with him, but that we have no idea how to deal with it."

"Right," I sobbed. "And no support network. I don't know how to mother this kid, let alone teach him. And I don't have friends or family to support me. To support us. Any of us."

I had never felt so far from home and so utterly aimless and powerless. I wanted my friends' shoulders to cry and vent on. I wanted my job back and a sense of purpose that didn't seem as impossible as raising children to be good people. I wanted a whole swath of medical and educational professionals around me to probe for answers. I wanted a world where there were answers, easily Google-able and available for my desperate consumption.

We talked until I was too tired for words. We talked about Dylan. We talked about our sailing trip and about Mexico. We talked about the magic of Vancouver Island and that short period of time where we were all finding joy in life. We talked about buying a little cabin in the woods and listening to the patter of rain on the roof. We talked until Tom said, "Let's not make any decisions until we've had a chance to slow down and stabilize our lives for a while."

And for the meantime, that stability lay back in La Paz. As

the bus wound its way through the Sierra de la Giganta mountain range, I marveled at the majesty. I marveled that we were here, on a bus from Loreto to La Paz, in a place I would never have been otherwise. I marveled at both my sons, cozied up on their bus seats, happily playing with their tablets, saying "*hola*" to other passengers, and dropping cracker crumbs on the floor. As La Paz drew closer and we wound through its narrow back streets on the way to the bus station, I felt my breaths growing slower and deeper.

We unloaded our bags and popped into a favorite pizza place, suitcases full of Christmas slung under the table. Dylan curled up on my lap with his head on my shoulder, and Andy busied himself with coloring. Tom and I drank our cold beers as we peered out over Bahia de La Paz in the setting sun. I felt a glimmer of joy for the first time in months. No, not joy exactly. Hope.

Dylan stirred and shifted positions, but made it clear he wanted to stay on my lap. I relished the moment of closeness, when he wasn't being crazy or extra clingy or defiant. He just wanted to be close to me. And then I realized it. I have to let go first. To help this sensitive child pressed up against my chest, I have to let go of my own pining's. Silent though they may be, my every thought and emotion is perceived, absorbed, and reflected by this intuitive and observant six-year-old. Amidst all our talk of how we can be better parents, how we can have a more familiar schedule, and how we can better understand Dylan's quirky behavior, the best thing I can do for my son is not to pine for the life we once had and the people we once were.

We strolled down La Paz's waterfront. We ate fish tacos. We shopped the markets and gazed at the murals and practiced our Spanish. We instituted game night and movie night and cleaning days. We did school every day. We disciplined and reminded. We doled out responsibilities. We doled out patience to the extent that we were able. And I tried not to look back. I

wouldn't pine. I would write. I would wonder and wander with my kids. And I would look forward.

Weeks later, I would look forward along Isla Espiritu Santo's shoreline to my son, skipping over rocks and gazing into tide pools where the red granite met the white sand beach. He looked up, a completely astounded expression on his face and a smile as bright as the Mexican sun.

"Mommy, I love exploring at low tide! There are so many cool things to see!" And off he went, bolting down the beach at top speed, still full of intensity, still full of energy, and now full of life. A life we would figure out together in our new home.

3

TIME TO ADJUST

JESSIE MACKELPRANG-CARTER

This short story was scribbled on a notebook page, while riding public transportation, roughly two months after we made landfall in Victoria at the end of a 22-month cruising voyage from Seattle to Melbourne.

Melbourne whirs by, a colorful blur of automobiles and shops and passersby. I'm seated on a tram that is bumping down Glenferrie Road on a late summer afternoon. It's nearly 30 degrees Celsius outside. I feel the vibration of the rails through the heels of my black pumps.

My eyes shift from face to face in the crammed car filled with rush hour commuters, but there are no eyes to meet mine.

I feel alone.

I try to force a smile from the blond across from me, a corporate girl with a mustard yellow purse, a tired button-down blouse, and sad eyes. I fail. She sees her smartphone but not me.

Returning to the digitized, heavily populated but under-connected circus of city life, I feel achingly alone. My mind is tugged toward a hundred moments where I felt connected to my brothers and sisters in humanity during our voyage across the Pacific from the United States to Australia. I bonded with people whose language I did not speak and whose customs I knew not,

but who smiled at me and we attempted to communicate anyway.

Cities are all still the same. It is me who is now different.

And I'm scared.

I'm afraid that I've changed too much. Too much to feel a sense of wholeness in having unlimited access to everything money can buy because I know that feeling connected to myself and others is free of charge and all that really matters.

I found completeness out there, with the sea.

I felt less lonely a thousand miles from land, awake on watch in the middle of the night while my husband slept, than I do right now.

What if I no longer care about any of this – career, things, money? What if I've ruined myself by having experiences so profound on our voyage that nothing else can lift me to such heights or expand my heart to such fullness?

Breathe.

Inhale. Exhale.

Reintegrating into civilization is far more difficult for me than cutting ties with it and setting sail. Perhaps I just need time to adjust. Time to build meaning here in this new city in this new country. To find me here. To create a me here.

Breathe.