

My First Year with a Wayfarer

By Gary Hirsch

I had been interested in Wayfarers since the early 80's when I read a copy of Frank Dye's book, *Ocean Crossing Wayfarer*. Years ago, I looked longingly at a boat for sale in Ohio that a kit builder had almost completed but lost interest in and was selling. There are still emails of inquiry from the 90's resting on my computer hard drive. I even have a folder of magazine articles cut out and saved that were authored by Dick Harrington and published in *Sailing* magazine.

I have spent the past 28 years with sailboats that owned me, starting with a 14' Laser and gradually progressing to a 34' Sea Sprite (Bill Luders design):



My wife, Stephanie and I have many memories of sailing our Sea Sprite, sailing all over Lake Michigan and finally cruising the North Channel and Georgian Bay for the entire summer of 1999. After that cruise, I was bored with daysailing on South Lake Michigan. So, I started going the other way – downsizing is the common term. Eventually, I bought a wood boat - a Blue Moon 23 by Thomas Gillmer - and loved it.

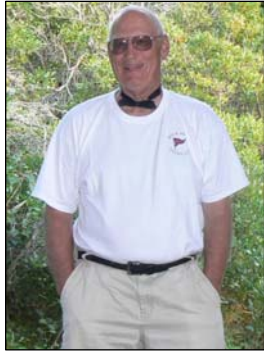


As purchased



After renovation

But, the maintenance was killing me, and a dockmate made me an offer that I couldn't refuse. I looked at a couple of other cruiser keelboats and decided that I really didn't want to start the process over, never mind the expense. It was time to buy a Wayfarer.



When I happened upon Uncle Al's Canadian Wayfarer website, I was positive that it was going to be Wayfarer time. I sent emails on every boat that I could find for sale. I started corresponding with Uncle Al about the various model differences. Then, I went to check out the closest boat for sale, in Detroit. It was a woodie (W1321) and had been stored for a long time with best intentions for refurbishment. Considering its 40+ years, I couldn't believe what great shape it was in. Even Stephanie was impressed! They wanted \$3,500, but quickly came down to \$1,800. I offered \$1,500 to include the bilge full of raccoon scat and a very cozy nest in the stern locker. On August 31, 2007 we took her home and put her in storage.



That winter I turned W1321 over in my garage, stripped the paint, epoxied the hull, reinforced the centerboard slot, glassed the centerboard and rudder, and painted her the original beige color. After turning her back over, I proceeded to strip the deck of old varnish, added reefing lines on the boom and ordered a new set of sails with two sets of reef points. Kent Sails couldn't understand the need for the second set. I explained that I would be single-handing and wanted the extra safety margin. Meanwhile, I was desperately racing to get the boat ready for the Chesapeake Cruise, where I intended to get first hand knowledge from the experts. I would be joining Uncle Al, world class racer in the W, and Dick Harrington, world class cruiser in the W. I had to get there somehow.

All during my preparation, I kept checking my sanity. Does a 57-year-old non-swimmer belong in a boat that can capsize? I thought it was fun in my Laser, 28 years ago, but did I have the stamina today?

Being a tax accountant, I don't have much free time prior to April 15th, and *Solje* didn't have a speck of varnish on the decks when I showed up in Crisfield, MD wondering if I should have come. When I explained this to Uncle Al, his response was: "I like your priorities. Let's go sailing! You can always varnish later." Before we set sail for Tangier Island next morning, I explained that if my son (the "tell me what to do" inexperienced crew) and I weren't comfortable on the first day, we might turn back. If that happened, I told them, they should just keep going as we didn't want to spoil the trip for the others. That is when Uncle Al suggested that we split up and sail with more experienced W sailors the first day. It worked! After that, we were able to handle everything just fine with the help of Al, Dick, Hans Gottschling, Tony Krauss, and Mary Abel.



The last day was another thing. The forecast had my breakfast lingering somewhere between my esophagus and my stomach valve. The rest of the plumbing was not in much better shape.

W1321 showed me her pedigree that day. Within minutes of leaving the harbor, we were wet from head to toe from the spray over the bow. But as we came around the top of Smith Island and started reaching and skimming over the water, I was yelling war cries! Maybe I was just letting my anxiety out. Anyway, if I had had time to look back, there were probably some rooster tails back there. It seemed as if we were barely in control. But, I never felt like we were going to capsize. The Wayfarer really is sea-kindly just like the web talk purports.



The approaches to Crisfield harbor: Hans and Al follow us in under jib alone

As we ran into the harbor at Crisfield with the main reefed, I had to smirk a bit as I watched all of the big cruiser keelboats, safely in harbor, nervously checking to see if their anchors were holding in the blow that we had just sailed through. We ended this trip on an adrenaline rush that kept me pumped up for months!

Besides varnish, I knew that my boat needed more modifications and I set to work on them over the next few months, only sailing once on Lake Michigan before going to Maine for the International Rally.

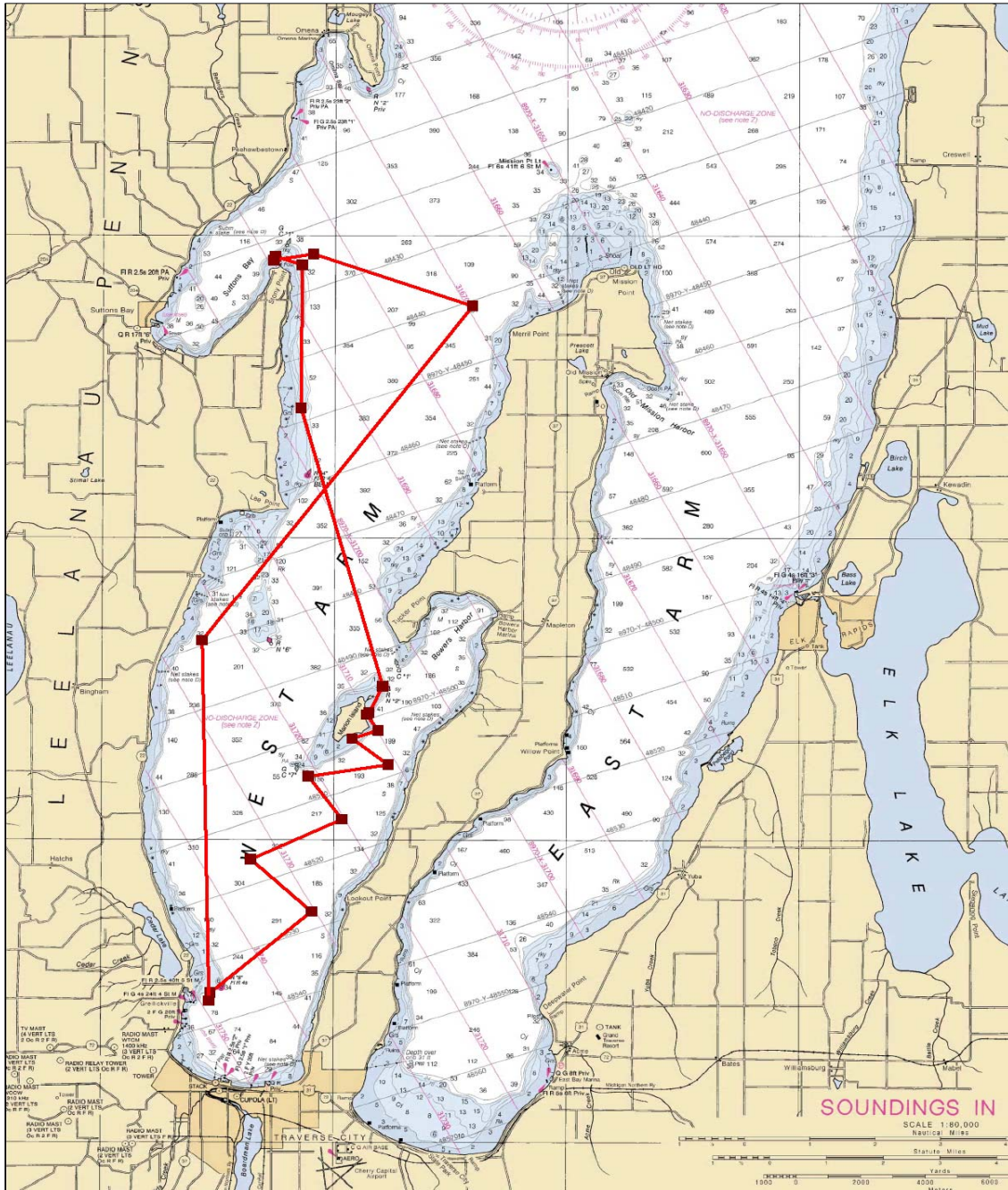


The International Rally! Wow! Sailing in Maine! Wow! Meeting more experienced Wayfarer sailors! Wow! This was a not-to-be-missed event. If you weren't there, shame on you for not re-arranging your entire life for this event! We had sailors from the Netherlands, UK and France - not to mention the US and Canada. What a great and diverse group! We spent a week sailing among the islands along the coast of Maine and ended with a great Lobster Feast party with stories and singing.

I wanted to give back in some way and so had volunteered to host someone from Europe.



I had no idea that I would benefit more than I would be giving back. Dick Harrington wisely set us up with Ralph Roberts from the UK, another highly skilled and experienced Wayfarer sailor. Each day we would go sailing, and later Ralph (*blue jacket*) and I would be down at the boat improving the set-up by moving bits around. We increased jib halyard tension, got rid of cleats that catch jib sheets, replaced shackles with a simpler system (I think I owe a thank you to Ton Jaspers for that one as I had seen his posting on the WIC site). And we left Maine with more ideas to improve my boat – a cascade system for jib halyard tension will be implemented. Easier access to the back hatch is also needed. I thank Hans Gottschling for letting me copy his set-up that can be seen in the photo at the bottom of the previous page.



And so, as my first year of *W* ownership was drawing to a close, there were still a couple of things that I wanted to do with *Solje*: spend a night at anchor and sail her solo. No worries: On August 28th, I drove to Traverse City, Michigan to sail Grand Traverse Bay (see chart above). My local West Marine store was closing and had many items on sale. I had been looking at the SPOT unit and now made the purchase. SPOT is a satellite locator that monitors your position and allows others to view the track of your progress on Google Maps. It was the perfect item that would let Stephanie monitor my progress and give her some reassurance that all was well. The button for a 911 call was also a welcome safety factor.

After launching at 3PM from a municipal marina on the west shore of the bay, I had a beat up to Marion Island where I anchored in 5 feet of water to wait until the North wind



died and the party boats left for the evening. At about 7:30 I moved around to the east side of the island – the forecast being for light wind from the SW. Having set up my Gottschling boom tent, I settled in with a book. I spent a pleasant night with the occasional centerboard scrape as *Solje* was in a very shallow water and I had left the board down to let me know if I swung towards shore which would warn me of a change in wind direction. The next morning I awoke to a forecast of SE wind changing to NE around mid-day. After coffee and breakfast, I decided to take a run up to Sutton's Bay, eat lunch and then sail back down the bay with the forecast North wind to end my trip at the start point.



← *North to Sutton's Bay*

Everything went as planned. The wind switched to the NE and kept building. I ended up surfing south during much of the afternoon's 16-mile run. Top speed recorded on my GPS was 7.8 mph.



South to Traverse City

This trip was a great way to end the first year with my Wayfarer. Most of the sailing was running with the wind – very relaxing. I was able to use my Harken furling gear to douse the genoa sail and the modification to the rear hatch made for much easier access.

Thank you to all the friends that I met this year. I have never bought a boat with so many added benefits before. Had I known that you all came with the boat, I surely would have offered more than I did. ☺ Active Wayfarer Sailors add much value to the Wayfarer brand, and those that I met made this past year special!

This isn't a traditional log describing a specific trip or sailing area. It is more a journey that encompasses a first year of Wayfarer ownership. I never thought that buying a Wayfarer would bring me so much opportunity for friendship and sailing. It was fitting that I should spend the completion of my first year “on the hook”. During this past year, I surely got “hooked” on Wayfarer sailing. I hope that this log will “hook” others to the pleasures of this design.

Gary Hirsch (W1321)

Related links:

the 2008 Chesapeake Cruise: http://www.wayfarer-international.org/WIC/Cruise.Logs/2008Ches.Cruise/08ChesCr_index.html

the 2008 International Rally: http://www.wayfarer-international.org/WIC/International.Rallies/2008/08IR_index.html