

Jan Burnes

The Reluctant First Mate

Cruising wasn't her dream but now it's the life she'd never give up

Looking back over the last four years, it is hard for me to believe we ever did anything else but cruise. We've explored the oceans of the world, from our home in New Zealand to the Caribbean. And in the years to come we'll continue to roam where our whims take us.

But I'm ahead of my story. It didn't begin in this way.

"Let's build our own boat and cruise the world."

When Bill first made this announcement, we'd only been together a short while and I was yet to learn that he always means what he says. We were living in Sydney, Australia, at the time, where sailing is a way of life and so, like any new wife anxious to please, I responded placidly, "That sounds really interesting, Honey. How're you



Bill and Jan Burnes have found a new and better life on the sea.

going to do it?"

On reflection I'm not sure if I was referring to skill or money; at the time we seemed short on both. However, Bill was not so easily thwarted and, in due course, he selected a yacht design and a builder and began putting his dream together. In those far-off days of 1974, I believe that my indifference was my emotional buffer. I wandered down to the boatyard whenever Bill mentioned I should, praised and admired the mountain of meaningless metal before me and smiled charmingly at the builder who seemed to be motivated by my sporadic visits.

As the weeks went by and I was able to identify the vast aluminum construction which resembled a huge, gray whale, it was still impossible for me to conceive that this was to become

my home and carry me across the oceans of the world. My only thought was how quickly I could get away from all the boring talk about welding, ribs, beams and design problems — back to the safe world I was comfortable in, the bump and grind of the corporate machine. I was marketing director for a very large cosmetic company and I loved my job; the challenge, variety and people contact suited me.

It took 12 months to complete the hull and when it was laboriously turned right side up, I was finally able to relate to this mass of metal as a boat. The fitting out began. Hardware, including winches, mast, boom and steering equipment was purchased and an interior layout had to be designed. Bill suggested I take charge of the interior design and color scheme. I accepted with alacrity, hoping it would create an interest and involvement in me that I had hitherto lacked.

Finally, many months and many dollars later, the deck fittings and interior basics were complete, she had a glossy coat of paint outside and a brand new wardrobe of sails in the locker. The launching day was fixed and we decided to call her *Carinya*

II (an Aboriginal word meaning "happy home") after Bill's previous, much smaller boat. August 16 found us gathered with many friends for the great occasion. After all the long months of building, I was now really looking forward to sailing on *Carinya II* in Sydney Harbour on Sunday outings with the family.

The champagne bottle shattered

I was far from grasping the fast approaching reality of Bill's dreams or the power of their motivation

against her hull and, released from her cradle at last, *Carinya* started her journey down the slipway to the water. Surprisingly, I was filled with a maternal panic. "Will she float ... what if she rolls over like a dead beast or plows bow first under the water and can't emerge again?" But no, *Carinya* floated beautifully and for the first time I felt a glow of pride.

Shortly after, Bill and I were offered a franchise to operate an international

cosmetic company in New Zealand. It was just the opportunity we were seeking and within a month family and boat were on their way to Auckland. We organized to have *Carinya* delivered across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand as we didn't have the time (nor I, the inclination), to take her across ourselves. Little did I realize that one day I would be aboard *Carinya* retracing her journey across that awesome sea.

Over the next four years, we took every opportunity to sail our boat and get to understand her. The children and I were seasick a few times but basically enjoyed cruising around the northern coast of New Zealand with its idyllic bays and quiet anchorages. With the hassles and frustrations of running a rapidly expanding company, *Carinya* provided a haven of tranquility for us to escape to. I really had the best of both worlds and could have happily continued with this lifestyle forever.

That was not to be. At the beginning of 1980, Bill began poring over charts during the evenings and talking of far-off, exotic-sounding places. "Maybe he really does mean to take



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us cruising," I mused in my preoccupied, uninvolved manner. I was very far from grasping the fast approaching reality of his dreams or the power of their motivation.

One day Bill informed me that he had been approached by a buyer for our company and that we should take the opportunity to sell while it presented itself.

"Sell! Why would we want to sell? We're doing so well, sales figures are higher than ever—and besides—what will we do if we sell the company?"

"With sales so high it's a tremendous time to sell; we may not find a buyer when we need one and we can't leave the company to operate itself when we go cruising. Leaving it under management never really works and only brings about a new set of problems we won't want to be bothered with when we're lazing about on a sun-drenched beach in some distant country."

Smooth talker. So, six months before departure day, we sold. Almost immediately I was offered a management position with a company that had previously been our biggest rival—what a challenge.

Once again, I plunged into the thick of it, giving little thought to Bill's now total preoccupation with his cruising plans.

In the evenings our conversations turned to weather patterns, monsoons and cyclones, choosing our route to coincide with favorable weather conditions. Slowly, as if at the end of a dimly lit tunnel, I began to realize that Bill meant business.

about the children's schooling?"

Jeff was 13 and Jeannine 11, both of them reasonably bright at school and popular, if the continual procession of kids through our house was anything to go by. I discussed the problem of their schooling with a teacher friend and was able to cover the possibilities with her. The obvious solution was correspondence schooling. I was assured that New Zealand provides one of the best systems in the world as so many of its inhabitants live in the outback and couldn't attend formal schools. I applied to the correspondence school in Wellington and, after a minimal amount of time

and red tape, packages started arriving containing six months' schooling for each child. I was very impressed with the presentation of the curriculum.

It was shortly after this that Bill suggested we start to sell our home, together with bric-a-brac and articles of clothing that we couldn't take with us.

"Won't it be marvelous, sailing free with our home all around us," exulted my husband one evening.

"If God had intended me to do that, I'd have been born a snail — it's too insecure," I retorted snappily, wishing I'd married a golfer instead of a sailor. "I love our life here in New Zealand, my job and the rewards it brings. I'll go bananas with nothing creative to do all day."

Some of my more liberated sisters may ask at this stage why I didn't simply say a loud "No" to the whole thing if I was that worried and upset. And I think my reply would have to be that deep down I really did want to share this wonderful adventure with Bill and the children. But my psyche refused to cope with the problems, both real and imaginary. It wasn't through any lack of confidence in Bill, ex-international yacht racer and survivor of three Admiral's Cup series, one America's Cup, seven Sydney to Hobart bashes and countless other lesser events. No, I wasn't worried about Bill's ability. It was the dozens of other little worries and the dissemination of my comfortable and secure home that invaded my thoughts and robbed me of the thrill of anticipation.

All too soon, furniture, excess clothing and cars were sold as were the kids' bikes and most of their toys. Only a few treasures remained to be stored away in trunks to await our return — how many years hence?

Carinya, now beautifully and comfortably fitted out down below, was re-launched and securely tied up in a marina berth. We moved on board and the task of condensing ourselves into our new 45-foot home began.

Our sailing date was set for June 12, only one month away; our destination was Mooloolaba, just north of Brisbane on the east coast of Australia and a great jumping off point for the Great Barrier Reef. From there, our estimable captain intended to take his crew and boat to Darwin and then across the Timor Sea to Indonesia.

A week before our departure, we had a farewell party with all our Kiwi

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friends. It was a lovely night with everyone eating and drinking too much. Underneath our frivolity, however, I sensed their sadness and concern at our going. We probably wouldn't see our dear friends again for many years and the realization of how much we had depended on them for our emotional survival filled me with further misgivings.

The morning of June 12, 1980 dawned sunny and clear with a light southwesterly to blow us on our way. We motored around to Admiralty Steps, the departure point in Auckland Harbour. Friends started to gather along the quayside, everyone talking too loudly and laughing too much. Why, they're as nervous as I am, I realized with a rush of affection.

At 5:30 p.m., we finally dispensed with the red tape and cleared New Zealand customs and it was time to leave. Hurried final farewells followed with words that couldn't make it past the lumps in our throats, the captain waving cheerfully to everyone and the children leaping up and down with excited anticipation.

With engine switched on and sails still furled, we pointed *Carinya* toward

the harbor entrance. I couldn't look back. Once outside, we set a course for the northern tip of New Zealand which we had to round before making the run across the Tasman Sea. As the sun dipped behind buildings in Auckland, the ocean hissed and swirled beneath *Carinya's* hull and I knew there was no turning back; we were off on the adventure of a lifetime.

With the engine switched on and the sails still furled, we pointed *Carinya* toward the harbor entrance. I couldn't look back.

I watched my children's faces mirroring the complete confidence they had in their parents and this new life we were leading them into and I felt a pang of maternal conscience. What lay ahead in the vast, inky wastes of the Tasman? And, if we did reach the other side in safety, what then? Would Bill's long harbored dreams become a reality or my fears a nightmare?

The nightmare wasn't to be.

Four years and thousands of miles later, I feel equipped to comment on our cruising life and the effect it has had on us. As with everything in life, there have been advantages and disadvantages. Living in a confined space aboard a yacht and being together 24 hours a day with often no one else to relate to for weeks at a time can put a tremendous strain on personal relationships. Conversely, you acquire more self-control and consideration for other people. One girlfriend observed, "I'm really happy when my husband and I are alone on our yacht with no crew. We can scream at each other if we want to!"

On long ocean passages you can sink into a state of apathy where even to get out of your bunk between watches is an effort. It was during these phases that we discovered new, creative hobbies previously not attempted due to lack of time or the distraction of "ready-made" amusements like the television. My daughter and I learned to knit, crochet and embroider; Bill and Jeff studied rope work, navigation, radio operation. We all enjoyed family games — Scrabble, backgammon, chess — all pastimes hitherto



Our lives are enriched by the experiences we've had all over the world on *Carinya II*.

ignored due to the demands of work and outside social activities.

Another advantage has been our escape from the social and economic traps we had fallen into. The more money we earned, the more we spent on improving our standard of living to keep pace with our increased earnings and the pressures of society — like dogs chasing their tails round and round.

We've discovered the wonderful,

soul-enriching experience of visiting foreign countries through the "back door," experiencing the people firsthand, their cultures, religions and politics. We've developed a basic command of several different languages enabling us to haggle in the shops and markets like fishwives. We have often been invited into the homes of the well-to-do locals, thus enriching their lives with tales of our experiences.

The children learned many things

from their correspondence courses apart from basic schooling. Their solitary studies taught them self-discipline, the ability to research facts for themselves (we have a set of encyclopedias on board), and the enormous satisfaction and pride in a project successfully completed by their own initiative.

Over the four years at sea, they developed into independent, confident adults possessing a respect and understanding of foreign people and countries unique at their age. Jeff is now 19 and completing an engineering apprenticeship in New Zealand. Jeanine, at 16, has just started college in England to study travel and tourism for two years.

Yes, for us at least, the advantages have outweighed the disadvantages and I think it will be many years before we look landward again for a permanent domicile. The total freedom and disencumbrance of our existence is so heady and refreshing that we are in no hurry to relinquish it.

Jan and Bill Burnes cruised from New Zealand to England where they took on the job of commissioning and running the 53-foot sloop *Adaro*. They now charter *Adaro* in the Caribbean.