



U-TURN

THE BLESSING OF AN UNEXPECTED COURSE CHANGE.

May had finally arrived. It was our time to head north. To escape, before summer's oppressive heat and humidity enveloped the Gulf Coast and our southern home. The rental car was packed with everything we needed for another summer aboard.

Another summer cruising the coast of Maine, a place that while still wild and rugged, was slowly becoming familiar to us. This would be our fourth summer discovering its treasures. Along our route north, we would also visit our favorite stops in the Chesapeake Bay, Long Island Sound and Cape Cod. But then the phone rang—my wife answered, and in a quiet moment, our entire journey changed course.

Her 95-year-old mother had unexpectedly become critically ill. She questioned how could this be? We were just with her last weekend, and she was fine. Without hesitation, we turned the car around. A U-turn—one swift movement that redirected not just our drive to the boat, but the entire arc of our summer, our expectations, our sense of where we were meant to be.

U-turns are rarely planned. They are more like an interruption, a sudden realization that the road ahead is no longer the one we should be traveling. Sometimes they are preceded with warning signs—gut feelings, quiet whispers of doubt. Other times they arrive without notice—like an unexpected phone call that demands immediate action. But a U-turn is not just an abrupt reversal; it is also a pause and

a pivot. It requires the willingness to abandon what was planned and accept what is needed. It is the act of circling back, of reconsidering and rerouting. And often, in making that turn, we find ourselves in places we never expected to be.

Fortunately, that phone call came in time for [REDACTED] to fly to Los Angeles and be at her mother's side when she passed. Now, instead of dropping anchor in quiet coves and tracing new shorelines, we found ourselves staying in the house where [REDACTED] grew up, sorting through the remnants of a life well lived. The house, untouched by time in so many ways, held echoes of her childhood—her first bicycle still hanging from the rafters in the garage, the collection of her mother's treasured knick-knacks and the familiar scent of old books and wood polish.

While certainly not the one [REDACTED] had in mind for the summer, cleaning out her mother's home was a journey of its own, and it required different navigation skills. This one was navigating through a lifetime of memories, both tender and painful. Each drawer opened, each photo rediscovered, each faded letter or trinket unearthed was a reminder of a woman who had lovingly shaped my wife's world. It was not the summer we had envisioned, but in many ways, it was the one we needed.

Grief is not linear. Like a U-turn, it loops back on itself, circling through sorrow, gratitude, longing and acceptance. In returning to her childhood home, [REDACTED] was able to grieve not just the loss of her mother, but the passing of time itself, the closing of a chapter that had begun in those very rooms.

At sea, we expect the unexpected. Weather shifts, currents pull, plans change. Our life aboard is made up of constant course corrections, adjustments to wind and tide. But on land, we often cling to the illusion of control, believing that we set our course and follow it without deviation. Life of course does not work that way. It is filled with interruptions, detours and reroutings.

Yet not all detours lead in the wrong direction. Some bring us exactly where we are meant to be, even if we do not realize it at the time. Had we continued to our boat, had we spent the summer as planned, we would have missed the opportunity to be present in this moment of transition, to honor a life, to close a chapter with care, to support one another through loss.

The things we resist—change, interruption, the abrupt turning of the wheel—are often the very things that shape us most. They remind us of what matters. They strip away the illusion of certainty and leave us with what is real: love, connection and the fleeting beauty of time spent with those we too often take for granted.

As we packed up my mother-in-law's house, sorting through decades of belongings, it was clear that life's success is not measured by how carefully we stick to a plan, but by how we respond when the ground shifts beneath us. A U-turn is not a failure, it is not a mistake. It is an act of recognition, of humility, of understanding that sometimes, the most important journey is the one we never intended to take. □

THE SEA WILL WAIT

REFLECTIONS ON GRIEF, GRATITUDE AND THE JOURNEY BACK.

It's June, and we're back aboard heading north. Hopefully with no unexpected calls or U-turns, just the steady pull of the seasons and the familiar rhythm of preparing to return to our life on the boat. After missing last summer aboard our trawler, the anticipation feels different, sweeter. Absence has a way of sharpening appreciation. And now, after a year of tending to family matters, we return to the sea, not just with excitement, but with a renewed sense of what it means to have this life.

Last year, my wife lost her mother, and we lost our summer of cruising. I wouldn't begin to equate these with the same gravity by any stretch, except that both have reminded us of the importance of spending time with people we love, and doing the things that we love.

Loss is not just the missing, more often it is the remembering, the longing. It is the sudden or gradual realization that something, or someone who once anchored your world is no longer there, leaving behind a space that refuses to be filled. It is love with nowhere to go. Sometimes it is sharp and immediate, like the unexpected phone call that turned our world around last May. Other times it is slow and quiet, like the tide pulling away, leaving only impressions in the sand.

The act of getting back aboard is always a transition, a shift from land's solidity to the gentle, ever-moving world of the boat. It's a process of re-familiarizing—the way the decks feel underfoot, the sound of water against the hull at night, the particular scent of aged teak and salt air. It reminds us of countless past adventures aboard. But this year, that transition feels even more profound. There's something grounding about stepping back onto a boat you know so well, about opening lockers and finding things just as you left them—reminders of a life that paused but did not disappear.

Stepping away from the water for a season wasn't something we

planned, but it gave us something unexpected in return: a deeper gratitude for this life we've chosen. There is a comfort in knowing that the sea will wait. That no matter what unfolds on shore, the tides will still rise and fall, the anchorages will still be there, and the friendships forged along the way will pick up right where they left off. Perhaps that's the real lesson in all of this: It's okay to let life intervene, to pause. To tend to what needs tending. The water will still be there when you return, and when you do, you will appreciate it even more.

Returning to the boat feels like reclaiming a missing piece of our soul. The boat has been such a constant in our life for the last 12 years. Each detail speaks of resilience and continuity, as if the boat itself understands our need to heal. Here, amid the rhythmic lapping of waves, we reconnect with our adventurous spirit and embrace the promise of new tomorrows.

We look forward not just to the places but to the people—those familiar voices on the radio, the spontaneous dockside conversations, the shared meals in quiet anchorages. Our life aboard has proven the connections we've forged are strong, no matter how much time passes. There is something comforting in knowing that the people who share this life understand its patterns, its joys and its inevitable interruptions.

There's also something deeply satisfying about slipping back into the cadence of our life aboard—the morning ritual of checking the weather, plotting the day's route over a cup of coffee, the feel of the boat coming alive beneath us as we pull up the anchor. It's a rhythm we know well, one that feels like home.

And so, as we prepare to get underway this time, it is with a full heart—not just for the journey ahead, but for the unexpected turns that have made it all the more meaningful. □





BEYOND THE PALM FRONDS

THERE IS A QUIET JOY IN COLD-WEATHER BOATING.

BY BOB ABBINGTON / PHOTOS BY BOB ABBINGTON

If all you looked at were the glossy magazine ads and slick productions that flood our social media feeds, you'd think boating was invented solely for the month of July. The imagery is usually the same: sun-drenched beaches, smiling couples lounging on the aft-deck, children leaping from swim platforms, and not a goosebump to be found.

I get it, the recreational boating industry knows what it's selling, and sun is easier to market than mist. But for those of us who've spent a lifetime on the water, boating is far more than a summer pastime. It is in many ways at its most profound when the temperatures drop and the crowds thin. Maybe it's because I grew up in Michigan boating on the Great Lakes, where summer was fleeting and fall announced itself early with a cold hand on the back of your neck. Or maybe it's just the way I'm wired, but some of my richest memories aboard are wrapped in wool, rather than slathered in sunscreen.

I loved those old Nescafé instant coffee commercials, with a salty sailor in a knit sweater, standing in a mist-shrouded cockpit, cradling a globe-shaped mug in his hands. The steam rising into the cool morning air carried more allure than the coffee did. Whoever dreamed up that ad may not have been a boater, but they sure captured what it feels like to greet a day on the water, when the season

tilts this side of the marble away from the sun. There is a sensory richness to boating in cooler weather, that the bright glare of summer tends to wash out. When I step into our pilothouse on a crisp October morning, the warmth inside feels earned, a small haven against the chill pressing at the glass. The engines rumble to life with a throaty sound that seems deeper in the cold air. Outside, a low-lying steam-fog hovers just above the surface, sliding like silk across the water as we ease out of the anchorage.

And then there are the colors—colors that you just can't find in July. The flaming reds and golds of autumn leaves reflected in a placid cove, or the monochrome beauty of bare branches silhouetted against a steel-gray sky. These scenes don't shout the way summer does—they whisper, and the whispers stay with you longer.

Even the wildlife seems more vivid in the shoulder seasons. On a cool morning, ducks and geese erupt from the water in bursts of energy, their wings slapping against the surface like applause. Herons stand like statues in the shallows, unbothered by human traffic because there is less of it.

Of course, one of the quiet pleasures of cool-weather boating is the absence of crowds. Marinas that were chock full in July, now echo with the sound of halyards clanging against aluminum masts.

The fairways are empty, the fuel dock quiet. On the water, you can travel for hours and see no one, save maybe a lone fisherman bundled against the wind or a tug slowly pushing along.

In this quieter time, it isn't seclusion we seek—it's solitude. And that difference matters. Seclusion implies being cut off, but solitude is a chosen aloneness, a space in which to breathe. Out on the water in November, solitude feels like a gift. We drop the hook in a cove once filled with jet skis and find it hushed, the only sound is the wind combing through the trees. The world is still, and in that stillness, ██████████ is not just our floating home, but a sanctuary.

I'll admit, boating outside of high summer demands more gear, but for me that's part of the appeal. There is nothing like a traditional Channel Island gansey; those tightly knit woolen sweaters designed to hold warmth even when damp. There's a heritage to them, a connection to centuries of mariners who faced the sea in all its moods. Pulling on a heavy sweater and watch cap before stepping out onto the deck feels almost ceremonial, a nod to those who went before.

forethought and care. Even a simple dinghy ride to shore requires a little extra planning. In this way, the cold is a quiet instructor, teaching respect through its very presence.

While cool-weather boating offers solitude, it also fosters a different kind of fellowship. The people we meet on the water in the colder months are there for the same reason we are—they love it. They aren't there to show off a new toy or to check a box on their vacation itinerary. They're there because the water is part of them, and they can't stay away.

Perhaps most of all, boating in cool weather lodges itself in memory. Ask a group of boaters about their most memorable days on the water, and often stories emerge about a time when conditions were less than perfect: maybe it was heading out on a frosty morning when their breath rose like smoke. These are the moments that linger, precisely because they are unusual, tinged with both challenge and beauty.

For me, the sight of steam-fog lifting at dawn from a quiet river



And modern gear, while less romantic, makes the experience even more comfortable. A pair of fleece-lined gloves gripping wet docklines in the morning, or the comfort of insulated boots on a frosty deck—all these details add texture to the day. They remind us that we are not simply recreating, we are participating in a tradition as old as boats themselves.

Cool-weather boating also sharpens seamanship in ways that summer rarely does. For one thing, there's less room for casual mistakes. In July, if I misjudge the current and it takes longer to get to the next harbor, we can idle along in the twilight without much concern. In November, when darkness falls early and temperatures plummet, suddenly our decision-making has real consequences.

Cold air also makes the water feel more serious, more elemental. We pay closer attention to tides and currents, to fuel management, to the accuracy of our route planning. Anchoring becomes less about convenience, and more about security when you know the night will be long and cold. Dock lines stiff with frost demand

in October is as lasting an image as any turquoise bay. The sound of rain tapping on the pilothouse while we sip coffee inside is as comforting as any beach party. These memories accumulate like treasures, not in spite of the chill but because of it.

None of this is to dismiss summer. I love summer boating as much as anyone. The long days, the warm swims, the gatherings with friends—those are joys worth savoring. But limiting boating to those months is like listening only to the chorus of a song and never the verses. The verses—the quieter, cooler, more reflective passages, give the chorus its meaning. Time on the water in the cooler seasons reframes the experience. It slows it down, deepens it, and reminds us that the water has many moods, all of them worth knowing.

Now, when I see a boating ad filled with palm trees and piña coladas, I nod and smile, but I don't quite buy it. For me, some of the best times in our life aboard arrive after the crowds have gone. A warm pilothouse on a cool fall day, a knit sweater against the wind, a steaming mug cradled in your hands—this too is boating. □