



# MOVE OVER



STORY BY ROSE FLAHERTY  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEA SENSE

## THERE'S A NEW CAPTAIN ON BOARD

“This is the worst weather we’ve ever had for this,” Capt. Carol Cuddyer said at the beginning of our two-day “Women-Only Boat Handling” class at Trawler Fest University. So gale-force winds and sheeting rain are not common to picturesque Anacortes, Washington, in May?

It was 8:30 a.m. on the first morning of the class, and 16 of us were tucked indoors at the W.T. Preston Snagboat Heritage Center in Cap Sante Boat Haven, sipping Starbucks and introducing ourselves. The students hailed from California, Oregon, and Washington. Instructors Patti Moore and Carol Cuddyer of Sea Sense, a women’s boating school based in St. Petersburg, Florida, had traveled the farthest to get here.

Our stories were vastly different, but our reasons for being here were the same—to blossom from competent crew to confident captains. We were looking for a maritime makeover.

One woman had started boating for the first time a year earlier when she’d met a new man with a new boat. They were going strong, but she wanted to learn how to operate a vessel herself and continue boating, new man or not—a relationship hedge.

Another gal wanted to throw lines and anchor the boat without her husband starting every sentence with “Damn it, honey.”

And how did I get here, a landlocked farm girl who was now co-owner of a 60-foot Selene trawler named *Celestine*? It’s not that I didn’t have boating experience; my first date with my husband, Jim, had taken place aboard a 27-foot Tartan sailboat. It was love at first float—I fell hard—and Jim wasn’t bad, either. Our courtship unfurled that summer during weekend sails on Michigan’s Lake St. Clair. Throw in a few moonlit cruises, and three years later, wedding bells chimed.

I then graduated to our matrimonial boat, a 34-foot Catalina. It was aboard her that I really honed my sailing skills. Several years later we moved up to a 41 Bristol that we sailed on Lake Michigan.





Author Rose Flaherty, far left, and her classmates try their hand at charting during a Sea Sense boat-handling course.

Finally, we relocated to Seattle and set our sights on a trawler: a 39-foot Mainship. The switch from sail to power took. We liked getting where we were going at faster than 7 knots and staying dry at the same time. Then, as Jim's retirement loomed and it looked like our dream of cruising the Pacific Northwest would become a reality, it was time to buy our retirement boat.

And so here I was, a relative newbie to powerboats, in cruising waters that had tides and currents and eddies...oh, my! If we were going to take that ultimate cruise, I would have to learn to operate this boat.

But not just start and steer. No. My goal? Run the ship better than my husband, who has more than 50 years of experience—if you count his boatbuilding at age 12, when he and a friend put a sheet on a pole, attached it to a canoe, and sailed their creation across Lake St. Clair from Detroit to Canada.

I fantasized about docking *Celestine* so adeptly that people onshore would break out in spontaneous applause—forget the fact that I had never docked a trawler before. Then my husband would call me down to the engine room, where I would diagnose and fix whatever problem he was having—to the amazement of marine mechanics everywhere. Of course, first I had to learn exactly what a diesel engine looked like.

All this I would master in 48 hours.

### TYING KNOTS, BENDING WATER

As our introductions wound down, we all agreed that we were married to the exact same man. They did all the

docking, while we women heroically jumped to shore and manhandled the heavy lines. They did all the maintenance; we made the coffee. They knew the mysteries of the electrical panel; we fetched the flashlight. They knew where the brakes were.

We were envious.

It was reassuring to hear that we all shared the same concerns—is that a rolling hitch, a half hitch, or a reef knot? Why can't we just make up our own knots as we go along?

We voiced the same fears: How do I stop the boat? Where is that brake pedal, anyway? And should I really jump when we get to the dock?

Capt. Patti and Carol assured us we would learn the answers to all our questions and would cruise into the sunset with mastery over our boat. And why not? Carol and Patti said they had "captains' licenses old enough to vote and drink." They would chart our future course and point us to true north.

After our morning bonding concluded, we marched over to the two practice boats moored in the harbor. We all boarded a twin-screw 42-foot Grand Banks for a safety equipment drill. We fondled flare guns and shook fire extinguishers to determine whether they were full. Air horns were demonstrated and bells discussed.

Then we divided into two groups: twin-screw owners stayed on the Grand Banks, and those with single-screw boats moved over to a Selene 48. With gale-force winds whipping, the sky spitting, and boats bobbing, I boarded the Selene to start my education.



Top: A woman's work is never done—Rose Flaherty, left, and classmate Jane Wright show the raw-water strainer who's boss. Middle: Rose, far right, and her "Women Only Boat-Handling" classmates master the art of the line toss at Trawler Fest University in Anacortes, Washington. Above: Fluid check! Rose learns how to keep an eye on the engine oil level. She was so inspired by the TFU course that she signed up for one of Sea Sense's five-day liveaboard classes a few months later.

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At the top of the agenda: starting up. The first thing I learned was to get the wheel in position—straight. We were lucky enough to have a boat with a rudder position indicator, but one can manually count the turns and divide in half. Tricky.

We quickly proceeded to a lesson on the throttle and shifter, making sure the engine was in neutral, starting the engine—whether by key, button, or both—and ensuring that the cooling system was working. Simple.

Now, the electrical panel. Ah, yes—the mysteries of shorepower deconstructed. AC versus DC, inverters, volts and amps. Which one is right for me...110, 220, 230? We all paid rapt attention once we learned that the proper functioning of our hairdryers depended on correctly calculating amperage.

Next stop: the dock. We put on our long underwear and foul-weather gear and bravely faced rain that drove down on us like it was January, not May. But we were

is inadequate prop wash moving across the rudder. Capt. Carol demonstrated how to bend the water moving past the rudder. Bending water? I felt like I was in a Matrix movie.

### CONTROL IS EVERYTHING

Next, a trip to the ultimate man cave—the engine room. All eight of us crawled right in and started inspecting, well, everything. First we observed. We sniffed and then visually examined the entire engine room for any signs of trouble. And we noted what those signs would look like: cracked hoses, broken bolts, loose cables, grease spills, green liquid, pink fluids, yellow drips—got it. Any fluid floating about uncontained is a bad thing.

Capt. Carol showed us where to find the oil dip stick—whose handle, we decided, should be painted pink for quicker identification—so we could check the engine oil. We scrutinized the generator oil, transmission fluid,



Left: Sea Sense's Capt. Carol Cuddyer, far left, teaches her students how to make power turns from the flybridge. Pictured next to Carol, from left, are Cathy Montgomery, the author, and Jane Wright. Right: Newly confident skipper Mary Robinson mans the helm.

weather warriors, determined to master what we must to tie up the boat. We practiced the clove hitch (good for fenders); the bow tie, which can be added to the clove hitch, should a certain man believe our knots are not good enough; and cleating. We learned at record speed and dashed back inside the boat for food and warmth.

After lunch, Capt. Carol gave us the bad news: we would not be going out in the storm. It was too dangerous, and she said she and Capt. Patti are charter members of the COS club—Chickens of the Sea.

We spent the rest of the afternoon studying prop rotation and PWE (the paddle wheel effect). Tips were shared on how to move the boat in reverse when there

and the fuel bowl and filters. We ended by checking the freshwater and raw-water systems and learning how to inspect the intake strainer to make sure it is not clogged with dirt or debris. We examined hose clamps and impellers, and the bilge for signs of excess water.

One woman recommended adding a little spice to our lives next time we're aboard by flirtatiously purring to our husbands, "Honey, let's pour a glass of wine and you and I head down to the engine room for a little look-see, hmm?"

We ended the day brimming with information, and we hoped that the next day's forecast would call for blue skies and calm seas.



"This is the worst weather we've ever had for this class," Capt. Carol moaned at the beginning of day two. It was a repeat—the wind howled and the rain poured. Not Seattle mist, not December drizzle, but the kind of rain that leaves bruises.

But we were a determined group of women who would not be denied docking, power turning, and single-engine maneuvering.

So we dressed for drenching, bundled up like astronauts going for a space walk, and sloshed out to double up our lines for departure. Capt. Carol shared tips for effectively using our lines with as little muscle power as possible. You don't have to be 6 feet tall and 180 lb. to secure a 20-ton boat.

And, just like that, we shoved off, operating the boat from the flybridge controls for maximum visibility. We covered all the basics: idling, reverse, prop walk, and—my particular favorite—power turning. We spun that



Neither rain nor drizzle nor gray of skies could stop these women from completing their docking drills.

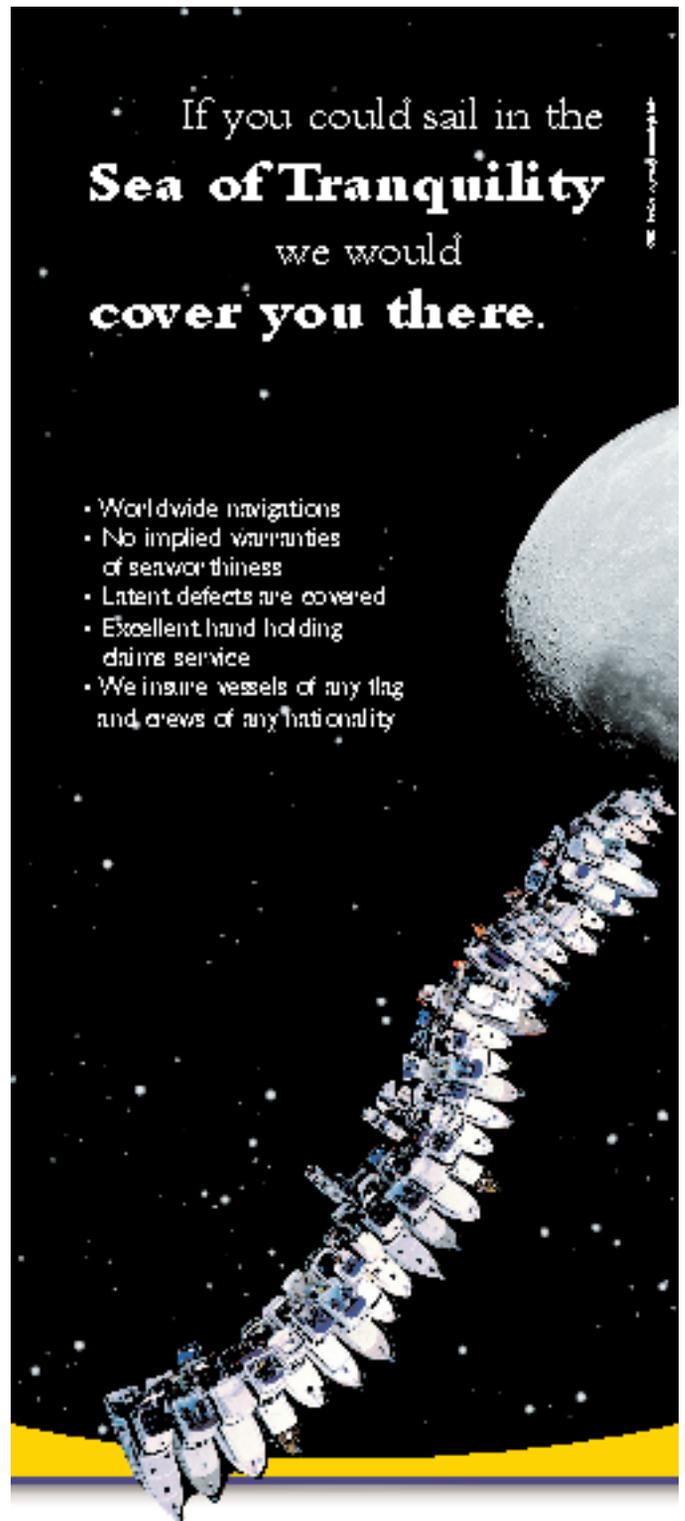
boat in circles until we were dizzy. We all took turns at the helm and got used to handling the boat moving in all directions.

Next, docking. Problem was, the harbor was too busy to practice at our slip. Trawler Fest was gearing up and boats were flooding in, so we used a steel buoy in the bay to practice our skills. We pretended it was a dock and that we needed to snug up 6 feet away. We all practiced drive-bys and side-to's, which wasn't easy as the wind pushed us toward our imaginary dock. But we all did it successfully, without a single dent to the boat.

After six hours topside in the rain—did I mention there was no hardtop covering the flybridge?—it was

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- For more information on Trawler Fest University's "Women-Only Boat Handling" classes, visit [www.trawlerfest.com](http://www.trawlerfest.com)
- To find out more about Sea Sense's offerings, log on to [www.seasenseboating.com](http://www.seasenseboating.com)

time to cruise back to the real dock. By this point, our hands were so wet they slid off the wheel. A few of us found the canvas flybridge cover and draped it over ourselves in a futile attempt to stay less wet.

When we passed an aft deck trawler, "Damn it, honey" said, "Look, there's a 'Jump, Martha' boat." Her friends had a boat just like it, and she nicknamed it that because when their friends were docking, the husband yelled, "Jump, Martha, jump," which she did. But the deck was too high and the dock was too low, and she splashed into the water.

This is when Capt. Carol advised that, when docking, it is much more sensible for the woman to operate the boat while the guy manhandles the heavy lines. Ah, yes—that was why we were here.

As we approached the dock, a big salty sailor trailing a white dog as small and fluffy as a cotton ball came out to help us in. "We're a learning class," one of our gals yelled, at which point he turned and fled, probably planning on radioing in a Mayday for the impending crash.

We readied our lines for docking. No "Jump, Martha" for us. Nor would we throw the lines onto the cleat—as Capt. Carol had said, "If I wanted to lasso the cleat, I'd be a cowgirl." Instead, we would bring the boat in nice and easy, snug up to the dock, and then

Graduation day: those "Women-Only Boat Handling" completion certificates were well earned.

serenely step off the boat to secure our lines. Control is everything.

Two women who had never *in their entire lives* docked a boat successfully docked the 48-foot *Selene* on their first try—in the rain, dodging dozens of other boats entering and milling around the harbor. There was no yelling; there were no wild hand signals. Just the calm voice of Capt. Carol saying, "Slow and easy." That's how to do it.

High fives went around. We eagerly tied up and, in our doused gear, dashed to Starbucks for a post-sail celebration. Capt. Carol handed out our certificates for having victoriously finished the "Women-Only Boat Handling" class—"in the worst weather I have ever had in all my years of teaching this class for PassageMaker," she reiterated.

We were drenched, we were exhausted, and we were confident. We were ready to handle our boats and show our husbands how it's done.

I was so inspired by my experience that several months later I took a women-only five-day liveaboard class from Sea Sense. There, I expanded on what I had learned at Trawler Fest University, and I practiced all the maneuvers until I could steer our boat in my sleep.

It has been almost nine months since I finished my classes. I have successfully docked our 60-foot *Celestine* many times now. I can bring her in for a side-tie. I can dock at our narrow slip, which has a 2-foot margin of error on either side, and I can back in if you so wish.

My husband is great at handling the lines—and he didn't even have to take a class for that. 