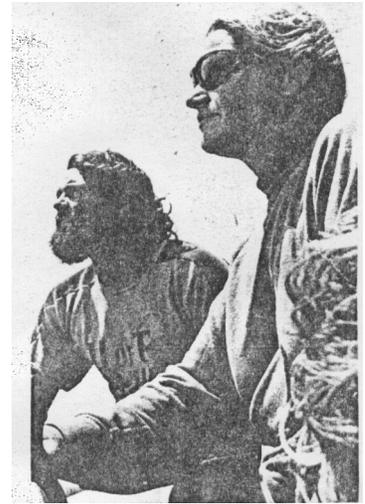


OUR BIG WOODEN BOAT



Dottie and Albert Fletcher.

PART I

Editor's Note: Ever think about flying off to Europe to buy an old vintage wooden boat and rebuilding her for a world cruise? That's what Dottie and Albert Fletcher did. The following is the first installment that takes us through the idea stage to actually sailing back to California in the first half of their global voyaging.

By Dottie Fletcher

□ Whatever possesses a person to think that he or she would want to live on a big wooden boat? As I sit here, on our big wooden boat, I must admit that in the beginning our reasons were different. I was the reader in the family so my dreams were based on all the romantic old sea tales I had devoured. My husband, however was in the trucking business and his dreams were definitely more along the lines of twin diesels.

So the shock wasn't too great when he informed me

one evening that he had purchased a twin engine Chris Craft. It wasn't too great that is until he also informed me that it was sunk on the bottom, but he got it "dirt cheap." As we all know there is no such thing as a "dirt cheap" boat.

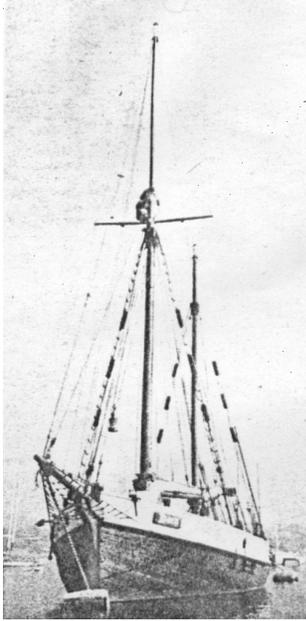
Eight months of hard labor and a small fortune later we did have a truly lovely 30 foot twin diesel cruiser. Somewhere along the line as we worked on our job and on our boat the idea of cruising germinated. Cruising as a way of life. Ah yes, the eternal dreamers, and right then and there we knew we would need a sailboat. A big wooden boat I kept thinking.

Neither of us knew a thing about boating - power or sail. So it was time to learn. We made a few short trips up and down the California coast. That was just enough to wet our appetites. We knew we wanted a long trip.

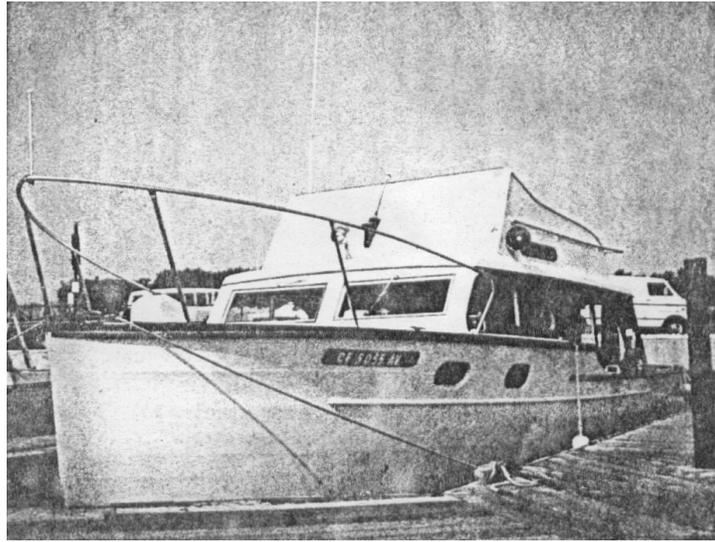
But could we just pack up and go? How long would our savings last? Could we find work along the way? We went over and over these questions. Finally we decided. Security be damned!

Albert gave up the trucking business, we leased our house to cover the payments and we moved aboard our 30-foot cruiser, "Serenity" and started out.

We left San Diego and made a leisurely three-month cruise up the west coast as far as the Canadian San Juan Islands. We looked for a sailboat in every harbor we visited. We saw two boats that left us weak in the knees. Both turned out to be Norwegian life boats of the Cohn Archer design. One of them not for sale and the other too high-priced for our budget. So on we went dreaming and looking.



The “Big Wooden Boat” in California



The Fletcher’s first yacht, Serenity, wasn’t exactly the right kind for a world

Now if two totally novice mariners (landlubbers you know) take to sea for three months they learn a lot. Most of it the hard way. We certainly had some fantastic experiences. But having survived them all we decided this was definitely the life for us.

After a delightful cruise of the San Juan Islands and a coastal trip from Canada to Seattle we knew we had to land for a while. We settled down in a marina in Seattle. Our trip over. Too late in the year to start out for anywhere in our little one half inch planked Chris.

What to do? I worked in the marina office part time and Albert went around helping everyone in the marina with their boats. The man he was helping one day, the one with the funny accent, was Norwegian.

Norwegian! Colin Archers - - wooden boats - - Albert’s brain started turning in high gear. After about a three-day acquaintanceship we agreed to do a lot of work on his boat if he would look for a boat for us in Norway in return. We all kept our word and shortly after Christmas Tonnes, our Norwegian friend returned to Seattle with good news about several boats that could be purchased, and one in particular.

Now -- no more talk. Either we went or we didn’t. Big decisions. If we wanted this one boat we had to be there within four weeks. Tonnes said he would wait for us and fly over with us which solved a big language problem. We talked and prayed and talked some more and finally decided to go.

We went to a broker and listed our cruiser for sale. We built two huge crates and packed all of our belongings in them and shipped them off to Norway. We renewed our passports and got our shots. And then we counted and recounted our money. Yes, we could make it if we were careful, got a good bargain on the boat and did all of our own work. Well, no backing out then, our crates were gone and we were committed. Our bridges were burned so to speak.

We bought our tickets, a fair sized investment, and in January, we boarded an airplane that was to start us on an adventure we never dreamed of as well as change our entire life style.

Upon arrival at Oslo we were late and ran from one terminal to the next.

My frantic memories of Oslo being scattered belongings all over the terminal because my suitcase flew open as I ran for the Customs line. It was a short hop to Stavanger, which seemed grey, cold and dismal weather-wise but entirely fascinating with its narrow streets and Scandinavian architecture. No time to stop and sightsee then, however, as it was a mad dash to catch the ferry boat to our new home. An island.

Everything seemed rather dreamlike to me. It was misty and cold and my first impressions of “our” island were a little grim. Few trees, flat, rocky terrain and barren. That impression was relegated to the back of my mind immediately as we were greeted by Tonnes’ family.

They took us in like they had known us forever and insisted we occupy their lovely downstairs guest rooms. This was of course our great good fortune because their acceptance of us led to immediate acceptance by many other people. On a small fishing island foreigners might not have been so quickly accepted. I would like to say that we feel because of Tonnes and his family our Norwegian experience was much easier and totally successful.

Working in Norway is not strictly prohibited but on our little island there was not that much to do. We tried to be economical at all times but the coffers seemed to grow empty at an amazingly fast rate when there was no income or very little. So Albert left me in

Norway alone for three months to work on the boat while he flew to Alaska with our friend, Tonnes, to fish for salmon. We were thankful we had done a good job working on Tonnes’ boat since Albert’s very life depended on it for months.

That was a financial windfall and we managed to not have to do any other work except on our boat after he returned. But that is getting ahead of myself. The boat -- ah yes the boat that first look at our big wooden boat wasn’t exactly what I expected. ❁

(Continue to Part II)