

From Very Small to Not Quite So Small: Voyages in Small Sailing Boats

Geoffrey H. Farmer

Frank Dye. *Sailing to the Edge of Fear*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1999. vi + 230 pp., illustrations, photographs, maps, appendices. CDN \$18.95, paper; ISBN 1-55109-283-2.

Dermot O'Neill. *Seascapes and Angels*. Doughcloyne, Wilton, Cork: The Collins Press (distributed in North America by Defour Editions, Inc., Chester Springs, PA), 2000. 216 pp. US \$15.95, paper; ISBN 1-898256-86-1.

Jerry Heutink. *A Trimaran Sails the Seven Seas*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1999. xii + 212 pp., photographs, maps, figures. CDN \$17.95, paper; ISBN 1-55109-263-8.

The title for this review essay might also be the prayer uttered by any sailor who has ventured in a small boat beyond the sight of land: "Dear God, be good to me; the sea is so wide and my boat is so small." As they say, there is more than one way to skin a cat, although I cannot for the life of me imagine why anyone would want to do such a thing, and I also have no idea why the saying arose. But it does seem to be appropriate in discussing these three books. They are authored by Frank Dye, the consummate English minimalist who dodges along the shores of North America and the Great Lakes in his sixteen-foot sloop *Wanderer*, the Irishman, Dermot O'Neill, who ventures forth from Kinsale to satisfy a dream of sailing solo across the Atlantic in his twenty-six-foot sloop *Poitín*; and the Dutch immigrant, Jerry Heutink, who, after completing the construction of *Trillium II*, a forty-six foot catamaran, sets off from Penetanguishene, Ontario, to sail the seven seas, identified by Heutink as the Atlantic, the North Sea, the Baltic, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Indian, and the Red Sea. These are three quite different books in many ways, but have in common the theme of sailing and satisfying an underlying dream to venture forth in a small boat to sail the questing sea.

Frank Dye, however, is a special case and already a cult figure among small-boat sailors for his numerous voyages in his sixteen-foot Wayfarer dinghy. These include passages from Scotland to Iceland and across the North Sea to Norway. He was sufficiently well known to be a feature at the Earl's Court Boat Show back in 1963 where, incidentally, he met his wife, Margaret. After a year of suffering outlandish discomfort in damp sleeping bags, wearing seven layers of clothing and things like rubbing meths to prevent pressure boils, she, despite

it all, decided to marry Frank, even though she had been warned not to "sail with that man; he'll kill you". [ii] Their honeymoon was spent aboard the first *Wanderer* (a fifteen-foot open dinghy); the wedding breakfast, "served in an insulated mug – green pea soup and scrambled eggs," had Margaret exclaiming that, despite many layers of clothing, "never before had I known what it was like to be so cold." [vi] But love and respect for Frank prevailed and Margaret was to sail with him for thirty years through some of the happiest and hellish days of her life until she felt she could no longer match the determination of this driven small boatman.

Of the three books, Dye's is to be commended as "a good read," at least for anyone interested in singling out a unique description of sailing in an open boat with only a tent as shelter, a small stove, sleeping bag, oars, and navigation by dead reckoning – no motor, no radar reflector (well, crumpled aluminum in a bucket), no VHF, but a pre-set weather box radio. To many of us this might sound like asking for trouble. Certainly a VHF might be rather handy, but batteries are a nuisance and dodging about offshore without a radar reflector seems an unnecessary economy. This is cruising in a dinghy stripped to the essentials. It is also a place where the apparent discomforts, such as sleeping fully clothed in a sodden sleeping bag, are easily outweighed by the sheer pleasure and joy Dye receives from the daily encounter with the wind, weather and sea while he navigates his little boat along the American seaboard from Miami to Maine, and from Maine through the Maritimes and the St. Lawrence to the western reaches of the Great Lakes.

There are seven separate voyages described in *Sailing to the Edge of Fear*. Each is a chapter and portion of the long passage from Miami to the Great Lakes beginning in 1988 (Norfolk, UK to Norfolk, US). *Wanderer* was shipped by container ship to Miami first. Much of chapter one describes the passage along the intra-coastal waterway, which he entered on 12 February. Not surprisingly, given the time of year he encountered deteriorating weather as he proceeded northward: for example, the 27 May entry read "Today, yet another storm." Though it was getting warmer, he lamented that "the mosquitoes are biting harder." [15] In chapter two, Frank and *Wanderer* had a near-death experience as the boat hurtled down cresting seas at twenty knots (the theoretical hull speed of a sixteen-foot dinghy is about 5.5 knots) with two fathoms of chain and 100 feet of braided warp whistling out astern as Frank struggled to free the jammed genoa sheet and lower the sail. Fortunately, all this served as a drogue and slowed *Wanderer* to a comfortable twelve knots. Perhaps this one experience prompted Frank to title his book *Sailing to the Edge of Fear*, although I am sure he is no stranger to that fearsome brink, so the title tends to obscure the real focus of this narrative.

Chapter three records the passage from Maine to Le Havre, Nova Scotia. An intransigent customs officer provided Frank and *Wanderer* with an officious welcome to Canada at Campobello Island in New Brunswick, but otherwise he encountered only kindness and helpfulness as he sailed on to Grand Manan Island, eventually reaching the La Havre River in October after many adventures. In similar fashion the following chapters record the yearly details of Frank's voyages that ended in the Great Lakes.

In order to fully appreciate this book the reader is encouraged to have an atlas or series of maps and enjoy a good geography lesson in the bargain, which will enable anyone properly to follow the peregrinations of intrepid Frank and his little boat *Wanderer* as they work their way northward. If I have any complaint it rests with the maps that precede each

errors in place names. For example "Digby Neck" in Nova Scotia becomes "Dingle Neck;" "Baddeck" is replaced by "Baddek;" "Rameo" substitutes for "Ramea" in Newfoundland; and "Rimouski" in Québec is mistakenly spelled "Rimousky." But none of these minor errors detract from what are a series of remarkable voyages by a very exceptional small boat man.

Will Frank and *Wanderer* continue their journeys of discovery? We will leave it to Frank to answer that question: "People talk about respect for the sea but respect is based on fear.. While fascination outweighs the fear I sail on. When the balance changes it's time to stop." [vi] Amen.

Dermot O'Neill came home to Ireland from an accountancy job in Sydney to take over the family hotel in the little seaport town of Arklow in county Wicklow. Haunted by the image of himself at old age "[w]edged into a lifetime offering more of the same" [15], and fearful that he was losing his sense of adventure in the comfortable arms of middle-class success, he resurrected a childhood dream of sailing the Atlantic in a small boat. His friends saw this as a form of madness, and one declared Dermot a "gobshite," the meaning of which even to my unfamiliar ear seemed pretty obvious and summed up the locals' opinion. *Seascapes and Angels* comes close to being the familiar account of a man setting out to sea to live his dream of sailing across the Atlantic and "finding himself." It has the elements of a loving father frustrated by his inability to understand his recalcitrant son, while the son struggles with his inner voices and self-doubts, wondering if he is one of those who dream at night and awake with the dream stillborn, or one of the more dangerous dreamers, according to T.E. Lawrence, who dream during the day and live to see it achieved. A sudden death of a former girl friend and a period of serious back problems propelled him to the decision to join the ranks of the daytime dreamers and to embark on his voyage.

He named his twenty-eight foot fibreglass sloop *Poitín*, after a species of illegal hootch distilled from potatoes in the more isolated parts of Ireland. Equipped with a twelve-horsepower single-cylinder engine, and electrics with cabin and suitable sails, *Poitín* and Dermot set sail one day down the east coast of Ireland and onward to Europe.

What followed is pretty standard stuff: gales, calms, worry, anxiety, fatigue, exhaustion, helplessness, terror, relief, joy, serenity, serendipity, friendship, camaraderie, and partings. It was never stated when the voyage began, but on 1 June 1990, *Poitín* was moored to a buoy in Lampaul Bay, in the French isle of Ouessant off the Brittany coast. On 25 November *Poitín* was in Las Palmas in the Canary Islands preparing for the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers.

Meandering through the Caribbean, accompanied by two young women, Brigit and Nina, the former introduced Dermot to meditation so that he could explore "the concept of higher self." [175] Evidently "it was the need to discover more about his soul that had driven him to sail." On 30 January 1991 *Poitín* was anchored in Chatham Bay in the tiny island of Union in the Grenadines. From here Dermot sailed home to Ireland. En route Tina, a young American, joined him for what turned out to be a storm-tossed and anxious passage to the Azores with a broken rudder. This chapter has the overheated title "Into the Madness."

Though we are never told when, Dermot, Tina and *Poitín* sailed on to Ireland. Finally, the lilt of Irish voices on the VHF and the beckoning shores of Arklow Bay in the lee of the Wicklow mountains heralded the return of Dermot, who admitted that "I know I would have made a dreadful mistake if I had not heeded my heart." [213]

This is an account of a personal voyage of discovery which at times borders on the maudlin. Chapter titles such as "Holy Feet on a Sear of Prayer," "To Court the Unknown," or "Believe All the Lies You Hear" belie what actually follows. They border on pretentious-

ness, as does the title of the book. I would recommend *Seascapes and Angels* for someone interested in observing the emotional growth of a man who, in this instance, takes on the sea as his mentor, like so many others before him, and no doubt like many who are still to come. The title could just as easily have been: *A Man and the Sea – Another Man's Story*.

I have sailed or visited, one way or the other, many of the ports and places that Jerry Heutink described in his account of twelve years of voyaging and chartering in his trimaran *Trillium II*. The trillium is the provincial flower of the province of Ontario, where Jerry Heutink built his ketch-rigged Cross 46 MKII trimaran. It is worthwhile to note these items because I find it interesting to read about places you have seen and to compare your impressions with those of the writer. Small boaters have some of that quality as well, I think.

Again, Jerry is a dreamer (by day), who eventually fulfilled his dream to sail away, completing the construction of *Trillium II* in 1976. With four companions, including his son, Harry, he set sail from Penetanguishene, Ontario, to cross the Atlantic to his birthplace, Enschede, Holland. Heutink is sparse on the details of years and dates, so we do not know when he set forth. You will also be well advised to have that trusty atlas nearby to follow the twelve years of voyaging presented here.

Initially, Heutink decided to journey through the great canal that joins Vlissingen on the Schelde estuary through the island of Walcheren (familiar to many Canadian soldiers from World War II), via Middelburg to the town of Veere on Lake Veeresmeer. Having completed this voyage in the summer of 1999, I was disappointed to find that Heutink had little to say about it, for it is a most lovely idyll through the Dutch countryside. Though Heutink did stop to express his extreme disgust at the littering on the streets of the town centre of Middelburg, that certainly was not my experience.

The book consists of chapters running from the "First Voyage of Trillium," to the "Fifth Voyage of Trillium." Each deals with a particular part of the twelve-year sojourn abroad, beginning with the initial voyage to Holland. Later voyages include passages to the Caribbean, from Holland to Sri Lanka, from India to the Mediterranean and finally from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean. *Trillium* was put up for sale when Heutink realized reluctantly that times had changed. So had he, and he concluded that it was an illusion to believe that the old times would return.

As one can imagine, twelve years of consistent passage-making with charter groups brings its own special sorts of problems and excitements, as well as the opportunity to meet many different sorts of people. Judging by some of his comments, Heutink took particular notice of his female shipmates; few of his charterers seem to have been men. Indeed, he devoted a whole sub-section of four pages to a discussion of a particularly irksome woman passenger named Louise, and in the closing pages remember fondly the seven women who had sailed aboard *Trillium*.

Those who scoff at the existence of the Bermuda Triangle will find the experience of Heutink and his crew on a passage from Fort Lauderdale to Bermuda en route to the Azores sobering. "White water" were the last words from the five US Avenger aircraft that disappeared in December 1945 over the Triangle. While transiting the Triangle, *Trillium* survived a mammoth wave (white water?). Heutink and his son Harry endured seasickness for the first time; a persistent and omnipresent depression overwhelmed them; the compass displayed a consistent aberration; and there was merely a hum from the radar. Yet all of this disappeared once they were safely in Bermuda. The Captain of the Coast Guard merely

Readers will find the third voyage of *Trillium II*, from Holland to Sri Lanka, particularly readable for it is a long passage through rather less-travelled waters including enchanting islands such as Isola d'Ischia, the Cyclades Archipelago (Mykonos), the Maldives and ultimately the serendipitous island of Sri Lanka. Egypt and the passage through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea are treated in some detail, as is the stretch across the Arabian Sea with its worry of attack by pirates from Socotra.

The book is accompanied by fine black-and-white photos that appear in the margins throughout. Yet there are errors in some of the captions. It is clumsily stated that "Papiamento is spoken by the black people of the West Indies" which, of course, is not [80]; it is a creole dialect of the Netherland Antilles. "Tot" rather than "tod" should be the item in the caption. [82] Valentia Harbour on Valentia Island (Ireland) is the terminus of the transatlantic cable from Newfoundland and not the point from which Heutink mistakenly suggests Marconi sent the first radio message. [101] The harbour in one photograph is not identified. [55] On Gibraltar he confused monkeys with apes, the pesky residents of The Rock and the paladins of England's maritime supremacy, at least in the past.

Perhaps it is quibbling, but if you are going to use foreign words and names and place them in italics then the author should be correct in spelling and consistency. *Signorinas* are Italian, but if you are talking about Spanish ladies then they are *senoras*, and it is *policia*, not simply *policia*. Sardegna is used for Sardinia and Napoli is used interchangeably with Naples.

Maps are an essential part of a narrative recounting passages from place to place. Unfortunately, Heutink provides the reader with little in the way of detailed maps. Instead he relies on small-scale (large aerial representation, little detail) maps which, with dotted lines to show the broad routeing, include enormous masses of the globe unnecessarily. It would have been far better to produce maps dedicated to each of the chapters. In other words, *A Trimaran Sails the Seven Seas* would have been a better book if more attention had been paid to its production.

Early on in his book, Heutink asserts that "*Trillium II* would proceed into an adventure that was unparallel in the annuals of boating." Heutink can be excused for the hyperbole, for it is a story full of adventure. Very much to his credit he is one of those dreamers who "dreamed during the day," then built his dream and took it to those far-off horizons.

This article is about travel by small craft, including both motor and sail powered vessels, where the vessel is owned or chartered by the travellers, and may be operated by the travellers. It does not include travel by large vessels, where the traveller is merely a paying passenger, and the operation and organisation is provided by the vessel's owners or operators; for that, see Cruise ships. Most novice sailors start out sailing small boats planning to up-size later, but many soon learn that there's no better bang per buck than a small sailboat and stick with what they've got. Here's why. And with all other things being equal, a good small boat can never be as seaworthy as a good large one but it doesn't mean that small sailboats aren't capable of some epic voyages in the right hands. You are here: [Sailboat Cruising > Small Sailboats > Sailing Small Boats](#). New! Comments. Have your say about what you just read! Leave me a comment in the box below. Recent Articles. Advertising your Sailboat Here Couldn't Be Easier - and It's Free! For many years, he had a monthly column in Dinghy Sailing Magazine, and he also writes for Classic Boat and Watercraft. Product details. File Size: 44470 KB. It is true that in larger sailboats recovery on the lee side is recommended, but not in small boats. He also suggests that cotton clothing is fine on the water, when nearly all other authors advise against it. [Read more.](#)