

Sailing Superior

Lessons and dreams of a life under sail

I was a youngster when my father first took me down to the waterfront in Port Arthur to see the ships. He had been in the navy and was determined to impress upon me his passion and the wonders of the sea to his eight-year-old son.

We looked over the waters of Lake Superior, watching the Great Lakes freighters and salties steaming their way into the grain docks. We stood beneath a signpost that read: Toronto 800 miles, Montreal 1,000 miles, Quebec City 1,200 miles, Atlantic Ocean 1,800 miles. My eight-year-old mind thought: Wow! I can get to the sea from here! The world was at my doorstep.

I was in grade three when I took my first ride on the Welcome Ship, and when I was 10 my dad bought the family a sailboat and named it after my newborn sister. Only 23 feet long, the boat was certainly big enough to start exploring the beauties of Lake Superior. Summers for my family included fireworks at Chippewa Park on Canada Day, overnights to Otter Cove, Black Bay and Silver Islet and, when we got really adventurous, Isle Royale. By the time I was 15, I was confident enough to set out alone with my high school friends, sharing my secret anchorages.

Every guest our family ever entertained—whether they were from the old country or one of my dad's seven sisters and family visiting—always ended up out on the boat. Simply put, it was the best place to be in the summer.

One day my dad suggested we sail down the Mississippi. The thought of a Tom Sawyer-like adventure captivated me, but the plans seemed to fall through the cracks. The years passed. I moved away to university, got a job, started a family, and left Thunder Bay. My career kept me travelling and I always made an effort to sail whenever I could find a boat: Japan, Greece, Finland, Australia, Spain, and every boatyard in between. The sailing was always fun, but it was not the great adventure my dad and I



had planned when I was growing up.

Circumstances finally led me back to Thunder Bay, back to the most beautiful lake in the world. Some things were the same, but small changes were noticeable. The mileage sign was gone, and so was the Welcome Ship. My dad had retired and was getting on in years.

If there was one thing I learned in all my travels, it's that the best years should not be the ones behind us. "Dad," I said, "we need a sailboat and we need to plan for a new adventure."

The ocean called. We bought a 40-foot sailboat, a beautiful ocean-going vessel. Over the next four years together we learned everything we possibly could about sailing. We raced our boat, we chartered our boat, and together we built a small sailing business in Thunder Bay. In 2004 we left Thunder Bay on a blue moon. Together with friends, family and charter guests we sailed for over 15,000 miles and eight months, past Toronto, Montréal, Québec City, out into the Atlantic and across to Lisbon. We transited the Straits of Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean, then back across the Atlantic to the Caribbean and, finally, home. Two months after

our great adventure my father passed away, but the stories and memories will remain forever with me as some of the best times of my life.

Sailing and the wonders of Lake Superior are the story of my life. I sail every day all summer long with my daughter, my fiancé and her children. My boat now docks where the Welcome Ship once did, and most of my sailing involves introducing local residents and tourists to the lake.

What would my life be like had I not stood under that signpost with my dad 35 years ago? It's about time someone replaced that mileage signpost. For now, I will continue to kindle dreams of sailing Superior and the watery world beyond. There will be future trips down the lake and out to the sea. The best years of my life will never be behind me.

Captain Gregory

If you are interested in sailing with Captain Gregory Héroux, either as a passenger or to learn to sail, check out www.sailsuperior.com.