

Start Sailing Now: The Allure of Adventure Hooked Tom Guay

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Novelist, musician, volunteer, environmentalist, reporter, citizen scientist. Tom Guay is all of these and a sailor too. After “escaping” Washington, DC, to the Annapolis area in 1999, Guay and his family settled in a little cottage on the Magothy River, with a pier. Tom recalls, “The pier looked rather lonely, and the idea struck... we need a sailboat!” Although neither he nor his wife, Karen, knew [how to sail](#), or anything about sailboats, Tom was called by the allure of adventure, and the couple soon owned their first sailboat. Here he shares in his own words a brief summary of his 25-year sailing journey.



Tom Guay

Start sailing with a boat built in the last century

It was my wife Karen’s dream to live by the water, and once we moved to the shores of the Magothy, I soon began to imagine the fun and adventures we could have on a sailboat. I assumed that such a boat would be prohibitively expensive, but my new local barber, a sailor, encouraged me to explore the possibility of buying a used boat. I discovered that sailboats built in the last century, without systems, without AC, without all sorts of amenities, are, indeed, very affordable. Since we had been big into camping during our DC days, I imagined such a boat as a moveable campsite—roughing it on the water.

We ended up with *Capt. Ahab*, a 26-foot Clipper Marine, and Karen and I became self-taught sailors (although we did graduate from a Power Squadron safety course). We took family trips to Dobbins Island, and Karen and I did our first circumnavigation—of Kent Island! Anytime we'd shove off our everyday troubles and worries would shrink as we puttered away from shore. I'd often be dreaming of sea stories both real and imagined. After a few years and a move to the Severn River, we thought, "We're of a certain age; wouldn't it be nice to have a door on the bathroom instead of a port-a-potty in the V-berth?" and we upgraded to *Salty Blue*, a 1974 Tartan 27 (now in the hands of a younger sailor with the time and energy to restore her to glory).

A little racing makes a better cruiser.

My sailing mentor is my pal, Jim Mumper. I joined his crew on *Diamond In The Rough*, a Cal 36, for the Wednesday Night Races. These were invaluable experiences. I was part of the crew for 12 years and always a rookie. She was a happy boat—no yelling. And because the crew so appreciated Jim as captain, nobody ever graduated from the *Diamond*. I got pretty good at sitting on the high side when the wind was screaming and getting down low when the breeze was light. My favorite position was running the mainsail. Somehow, I just knew what Capt. Jim wanted before he asked.

Aboard our own boats, sailing was all about cruising and relaxing. It's how I became an expert at fair weather sailing. Give me clear skies and 10 to 12 knots, and I'm your captain. We cruised to St. Michaels, overnighted in Shaw Bay, enjoyed day sails close to home, and rafted up with friends in Galesville. Early on we regularly cooked complicated, delicious meals aboard. Over time we slowly shifted to takeout. It was easy, living on the Severn, to bring home dinner, pick up a Navy mooring ball in a nearby creek, relax, and watch the moonrise.

I loved singlehanded our boats and discovered the joys of sailing at night. Wow, it's quiet on the water after dark—and breathtaking the way the stars fill the heavens on a moonless night.



Tom Guay sailing

How has sailing influenced you?

Sailing has been a huge influence. As I gained experience and confidence, I started working the ideas of sailing and adventure into my writing life.

First, there is the musical side of things. I'm a member of the Eastport Oyster Boys, known for original songs about life on the Chesapeake and the Maritime Republic of Eastport. I've contributed a few songs based on my sailing experience. "On the High Side" is a regular "hit" during Oyster Boys concerts.

Second, I've started a new career as a novelist. My first book, "Chesapeake Bound," was published this year. It's an 18th century nautical/historical novel that includes a risky ocean crossing. My sailing experiences show up in various ways so the reader can appreciate what life was like on a crowded brig.

Advice for adults who dream of learning to sail?

The closer you live to the water, the easier it gets. Lessons are a huge help and speed up the learning curve. The best sailing on the Chesapeake is after Labor Day. Finally, don't enlist your children in travel sports; you'll never have time to sail.



Tom Guay, Habitat Instructor

What kind of boating are you doing now?

This year I launched a new business venture, Eco-Ed Endeavors. I host students and adults for hands-on scientific river expeditions to track osprey, oyster, and horseshoe crab habitat, and we study how pollution affects water quality in the Chesapeake. You can't do this in a sailboat, so I had to move over to "the dark side." I kissed *Salty Blue* goodbye and bought a 1999 Grady-White Adventure. It's perfect for hosting science expeditions for small groups.

Editor's Note: Find "Chesapeake Bound" at local bookstores and on Amazon. Learn more at thomasguay.com.

[Read more new sailor stories.](#)