



Interview Questions and Answers
for Wendy Hinman, Author of *Tightwads on the Loose*

Tell us about the dangers you encountered.

We had a number of close encounters with ships, which, if they'd hit us, they might not have even noticed. We survived several typhoons and storms that threatened to turn our home into kindling. We heard about several boats that lost people overboard or in which people were injured, sometimes fatally.

What was the scariest moment?

We had quite a few scary moments. One was when we were in the South China Sea in a storm surrounded by fishing boats that were lit brightly and fast-moving container ships that weren't. There was so much traffic, it was hard to avoid a collision. Plus we were in a gale without a moon. But we survived after a very tense couple of days. Another ship in the north Pacific emerged from a thick fog so close we had no time to react. I thought we were done for that time. We lost power several times frighteningly close to a reef.

Tell us about some of the people you met out sailing.

We often traveled in the company of other sailors and it was tremendous to have such a strong community. Of course, most of those people had much fancier, larger boats with many of the comforts of home, but it didn't matter much. We were all out there together facing many of the same obstacles and we banded together in a way that we rarely see in shore-side life apart from the rare natural disaster. We met locals everywhere and found that people were incredibly generous and welcoming. In Japan, we had a man who spent nearly an entire day helping us get propane, then he took us out to a sushi feast afterward. People gave us fish, pastries and coconuts on many occasions. People lent us cars and motorcycles. The generosity of people was astounding. I wonder if we are as welcoming to foreigners when they visit our country.

What was the biggest challenge in deciding to undertake this adventure?

It was hard to figure out how best to prepare on a low budget. Technology offers so many conveniences that over time we grow to rely upon, forgetting that people survived for centuries before they existed. Sailing magazines and books can be intimidating, leading you to believe you need far more equipment to be safe aboard a boat than people

have used historically. The difference between wants and needs becomes harder to distinguish the longer those conveniences have been in existence. We often forget that all those conveniences come at a price, that they infringe upon our freedom in many ways. They require power to run, which then dictates how we can use them depending on our ability to secure that power.

Did you encounter any pirates?

We had a scary incident with unfriendly locals who I'm not 100% sure weren't pirates as well as some spooky after-dark close encounters with phantom vessels.

Did you encounter a lot of storms?

We endured a lot of stormy weather, but the worst storm was the last one. After 46 days of non-stop sailing from Japan to North America, we were within 5 miles of making it into port, but the wind and waves came up and drove us off. We couldn't make it that last 5 miles, so we had to wait another 3 days for the storm to abate. We grew very discouraged. We felt as though we'd endured about as much as we could tolerate after a cold and lonely 46 days of isolation. But it took us another 3 days to make it into port.

How could you stand being in such a small space with your husband 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for years?

We'd been married for 12 years and had sailed together and remodeled our house several times, so we'd already worked through a few issues. I learned quickly that I could be "right" or I could be happy, so I let a lot of things go that just weren't worth battling over. We needed to function as a team and I realized that it wasn't smart to argue with the only person on the planet who knew where I was at the moment and on whom I depended for my safety and quality of life. We abandoned a lot of arguments that were silly by realizing that we were overheated or hungry at the time. We'd agree to postpone an argument until after we ate something and then discovered, once we were fed, that we weren't in disagreement. I think I was pretty lucky that I ended up with a pretty mellow, considerate person. We paid attention to our different approaches to life and made sure we acknowledged that each approach was equally valid. He's an introvert and I'm an extrovert, so we found ways to give him quiet time while I got my people time. (Traveling with other sailboats helped, because I could go hiking or snorkeling with fellow sailors while Garth read a book.)

How did you live without refrigeration?

People have lived without refrigeration for centuries. We bought food in smaller packages and finished it quickly. We relied on the age-old techniques for food preservation, like brining, drying, and pickling. We were very careful about contaminating sterile packaging, always using a clean utensil and quickly sealing lids afterward so as not to introduce bacteria. We kept mayonnaise and mustard in squeeze bottles at room temperature for years. Perhaps in the process we developed stomachs of steel, but it worked for us.

What did you eat?

We stocked up on whatever fresh produce we could find in port and could usually get it to last until we got to the next port. As long as we kept it well ventilated and padded. I once got a Jicama in Mexico that we carried all the way to New Zealand six months later. The key is keeping produce from getting bruised in the first place. Buying it directly from farmers meant that it was very fresh. Of course we carried canned goods, pasta and rice and baking ingredients, as well as some dehydrated vegetables.

Did you catch a lot of fish?

We kid that we caught more fish by being friendly than by putting out a fishing line. Locals and other sailboats gave us fish often. We didn't have the best of luck fishing. We discovered that the best times to catch fish were when we were making landfall, a time when we need to be navigating dangerous reefs and rocks as well as shipping traffic. So we often pulled in our fishing lines during prime fishing times. But yes, we did catch fish and eat it within minutes and there's nothing fresher. Sometimes we pickled it and then snacked on it later.

How did you bathe?

When we were in port, we swam and then shampooed in our dinghy. We did a fresh water rinse with a garden sprayer or a teacup. When we were underway we used buckets to grab saltwater from the sea and pour it over ourselves, then lather up and rinse off with more saltwater. Just before we finished, we'd rinse with a few teacups of fresh water. And we often wiped ourselves down with a freshwater rinsed washcloth.

How did you wash clothes?

We mostly washed clothes by hand in a bucket with a mini toilet plunger to help simulate the agitation cycle. We used generous quantities of liquid soap and lots of saltwater. We did a final rinse in fresh water and then hand-wrung the moisture out of the clothes and hung it up on clothes lines we strung up. Sheets were the worst because they took up so much space. We caught a lot of fresh water in our dinghy and because it had two compartments, it worked well for a wash and rinse cycle. We rarely "sent out" our laundry to locals to do. We found that often things went missing or got ruined (stained or the elasticity got overheated in dryers by people who weren't very careful) and since we couldn't easily replace clothes, it wasn't worth the risk. Of course, we used laundromats with washing machines whenever we could find them.

What was the biggest challenge in making meals?

Sometimes I felt like Suzy-Homemaker of the high seas, trying to cook under sometimes ridiculous circumstances: without key ingredients and under conditions that required acrobatic prowess to manage. I have discovered more ways to cook rice, cabbage and eggplant than I ever knew existed, since they seemed to be available in every country we visited and lasted well in the heat of the tropics. I also learned how to cook so many things I'd never cooked before because I had the time and determination to figure it out. Once I flung spaghetti bolognese across the entire cabin on a rough passage, which left us

with . Another time, my pressure cooker exploded, leaving a green goo oozing from the ceiling that resembled the rejects from someone's recent violent indigestion.

What did you do at night?

When we were in port, we anchored. When we were traveling, we sailed through the night. We kept watches throughout the night to make sure we didn't hit anything or go off course. At first we had 3 hour watches, with one person keeping track of everything while the other slept. Later we switched to 4 hour watches and found we felt more rested.

Did you ever feel claustrophobic?

When the weather was bad and we had to spend all our time inside, I did occasionally feel claustrophobic. Especially on that last passage when we encountered heavy fog and my world outside seemed as small as the one inside the boat. But mostly the weather was good and we spent a large percentage of our time in the great outdoors, enjoying the beauty that nature had to offer. The whole world felt like out backyard.

What did you miss most?

I missed family and friends. In colder climates, I missed a bathtub, so I could take hot baths. I also missed unlimited hot water for dishes.

Did you read newspaper to keep up with the world?

We lost track of the news to a large extent. We realized, that though we'd been news junkies before we left, that the news is not terribly uplifting most of the time. Often filled with death and destruction over which we had no control. And generally the news is filled with speculation about what might happen. But we did listen to BBC news and whatever programs we could tune in depending on where we were. We missed 9/11 and it took us a long time to grasp what actually happened and why everyone reacted the way they did.

What 3 things would you tell people who want to do this?

Aspire to live simply. The more complex your life is, the more it infringes on your freedom. Instead of owning things, they begin to own you.

Like camping, exploring and meeting your basic needs is a big part of this lifestyle and part of the adventure.

This lifestyle gives you a chance to see the world differently but it also poses questions about the things you've held dear.

What 3 things would you ask people to figure out whether this lifestyle is right for them?

Do you like to travel and go camping?

Are you flexible?

Do you have a sense of humor?

Did you ever get sick? What would you do in a medical emergency?

We were fortunate that we were never sick or had any medical emergency while we were sailing. We carried a significant medical kit with antibiotics, painkillers, and medical equipment for emergency first aid. We also carried first aid books and had trained in first aid classes before our departure. We gave antibiotics to another sailor who suffered from an infection and delved into the antibiotics once for an ear infection that quickly healed. We were able to replace our supplies, which don't last as long in tropical heat, in Mexico, Fiji and Vanuatu without prescriptions. We heard of sailors that did experience serious injuries, infections, injuries from getting hit by the boom and heart attacks. But it's hard to say whether they would have been better if they hadn't been traveling on a sailboat. I think in some ways we lived a more healthy, balanced life because we got more exercise and had time to focus on the important things. Also we didn't suffer from some of the same perpetual low-grade stress as we did in our workday lives: rushing to work, traffic, grim news reports.

Your book is called *Tightwads on the Loose*. Did you think of yourself as a tightwad before your journey or did that develop on your journey?

Garth and I both grew up in frugal families, but those skills really came in handy when we had more time than money. Once we started planning this trip I started equating my time in terms of hours worked with the money that things cost. I made a lot more decisions based on valuing my time more than I valued whatever convenience or item I considered buying. I do remember a moment before we left when I had a serious case of buyer's remorse and realized that what I had just spent hard-earned cash to buy required more work for the convenience it touted.

Did you plan to be gone for 7 years?

We had no idea when we bought this tiny boat that we'd be gone for seven years. Then again, if we'd bought a bigger fancier boat, it might not have been affordable to be gone for so long.

Did you want to keep going forever?

I did. Garth reached a point when no longer found this lifestyle to offer him the stimulating challenge it once had. He needed a new challenge. I was slower to realize this, but Garth's foresight led me there sooner than I might have realized otherwise. We'd seen people who'd grown bored with not enough challenge in their lives and we were just beginning to reach that point.

Are there others who stay out there forever and never come back?

We traveled with several couples who'd been out sailing as long as 16-17 years. Some had stopped to work and save for more adventures. Others hadn't. The ones who paused seemed to appreciate what they had a little more. The contrast showed them the value of each way of living. Each way of living has its up sides and down sides.

Did you have difficulty returning? What were the biggest challenges? What advice

would you give to others contemplating a return to society after such a venture?

We both had trouble with the transition back to society. I did in particular. We arrived just before the big downturn in the economy, which meant the news every day was grim and all around us. Our return coincided with a severe shortage of mooring slips so we had nowhere to put the boat or ourselves the first few months. We also returned just before a very difficult winter (by all accounts) when we were ill-equipped to deal with cold weather. Our bodies has readjusted to the intense heat of the tropics and I think I was cold the entire first two years.

Did you always plan to write a book when you started this?

I've always been an avid reader and long thought I might like to write a book, but had nothing particular in mind. I left without any idea that my adventures would turn into a book. I'd gotten positive feedback about my updates. People said, "You should write a book!"

What is your next adventure?

We definitely plan to go voyaging again, on a boat that Garth can stand up in next time. We'd love to cruise around South America and Europe. Garth wants to build a boat of his own design.

What was your favorite place?

That's a really tough question. It's hard to pick one. Each place had terrific attributes that are hard to compare. Some offered incredible wildlife, like Fiji's soft coral and abundant waterfalls. Others offered unsurpassed cultural experiences, like Hong Kong, Lan Yu in Taiwan, and Japan. Some were incredibly interesting because of when we were there, for example, New Zealand hosted the America's Cup, Volvo Ocean Race and the Around Alone races while we were there, so it offered a unique glimpse into another world.

What was your least favorite place?

That question is a little easier to answer. We found the Solomon Islands to be very challenging because there we endured relentless suffocating heat and heat rashes, and crocodiles in addition to facing a population that seemed shell shocked from a lengthy civil war. Also we suffered an electronic meltdown there that threatened our voyage and lifestyle, so we got pretty discouraged. In the Philippines, we were clearly not locals, but we weren't rich tourists either, so we felt a bit like walking wallets.

What cultural conflicts did you encounter?

We faced language problems several places, in Japan when we couldn't even read. In Vanuatu where they speak a form of pidgin English, we recognized English words yet had trouble communicating. Everywhere we were guests, there at the mercy of local officials, who were almost always fair and welcoming but occasionally corrupt, like in the Philippines.

What lessons did you learn?

I learned how many other equally valid ways there are to live life besides the harried life we westerners choose. I also learned that the happiest people didn't necessarily have much in the way of material goods.

How are Americans perceived by people in other countries. Did you come away with a new view of your own country?

During the Bush Administration, we constantly were bombarded with questions about what the American government was doing. We were relieved to discover that most people distinguished between Americans and our government, which does not always represent us. We were also chided for how ignorant most Americans are of geography and the world outside the U.S. borders. It was embarrassing sometimes. We also were asked lots of questions about how religious zealots could have taken over the country and whether all Americans held these views.

How could you afford to do this for so many years?

We lived on \$33 per day, the amount that our house rent brought in each month. We could do that because we mostly stayed in less expensive countries and because we lived on a very small and simple boat and used little to no fuel. Our expenses were mostly for food, boat repairs and customs and immigration fees.

Where were you during 9/11? How did you find out about it?

We were sailing between Bora Bora and the Cook Islands. We heard about it from other sailors on a radio discussion net. We had trouble finding real news to learn what actually happened. So much of what we knew came merely from speculation rather than facts. We didn't reach shore for another four days and even then found little to fill us in on what had happened. It took us a long time to understand what had happened and the reaction that followed.

As you page through the book, what jumps out at you as the most memorable aspects?

What comes to mind are the amazingly generous people we encountered throughout the course of our travels. If you listened to the news, you'd have no idea how kind people are around the world. These experiences restored our faith in humanity. I think everyone would benefit from traveling and seeing the world with their own eyes. It would do wonders for compassion. I also realized that some of our most satisfying experiences are the ones that posed the most challenge. In modern society, we spend a lot of our energies on conveniences that are often not all that convenient and we lose track of our place in the world and what is important. This voyage gave me a chance to reconsider my priorities. Time is our most precious resource, and I am more focused now than ever on doing the things that are the most satisfying, regardless of what society's priorities are.