

Author shares tales of high seas

■ Couple love life on Pacific, plan to return

By Tad Sooter

Special to the Kitsap Sun

There were moments when Wendy Hinman just wanted to go back to shore.

There was the crossing from New Zealand to Fiji when her little wooden sailboat pounded into towering seas for 11 days straight. Huddled in the tomblike cabin, she and husband Garth Wilcox felt the boat absorb each wave.

"We could just feel the boat shuddering," Hinman said. "I thought, 'Why do I want to do this again?'"

Those moments were rare in the seven years the Bainbridge Island couple spent sailing the Pacific in their 31-foot boat Velella. More often,

See SAILING, 5A

AUTHOR APPEARANCES

Wendy Hinman, author of "Tightwads on the Loose," speaks at 2 p.m. today at the Manchester Library and 2 p.m. Tuesday at the Sylvan Way Library in Bremerton. Hinman also will take part in the Bainbridge Island Wooden Boat Festival on June 15-16. For information, go to www.wendyhinman.com.

SAILING from 1A

Hinman remembers the people she met, the sunsets on secluded harbors, the dolphins carving phosphorescent patterns into the water at night. Moments when she never wanted to go back.

Hinman captured the highs and lows of those nomadic years in her book, "Tightwads on the Loose," a lighthearted account of a 34,000-mile ocean voyage on a too-small boat. The boat — purchased with budget rather than comfort in mind — was so cozy Wilcox could hardly sit upright, let alone stand in the cabin. They spent nearly every hour together aboard Velella, sometimes traveling for weeks without seeing other humans.

The couple pushed off from a Seattle dock in 2000 with no particular itinerary and no schedule. The departure was the culmination of years of preparation for Hinman and Wilcox. Both were lifelong sailors, Hinman said, and a world cruise was a dream they shared. Eventually, they realized it couldn't wait.

"You never know how much time you'll get," she said.

They left Puget Sound and pointed Velella south and then west, scooting among the South Pacific Islands. The couple fell into a new rhythm of life on Velella, a life guided by the weather, tides and a miserly budget. Their rental house in Seattle gave them a small but steady income, and they lived on about \$33 a day.

"If we spent too much we'd just go to some remote anchorage and snorkel or



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

ABOVE: Wendy Hinman and husband Garth Wilcox, of Bainbridge Island, spent seven years in the Pacific aboard the 31-foot Velella. Their journey is chronicled in "Tightwads on the Loose."

RIGHT: An illustration from Wendy Hinman's book depicts the 34,000-mile route that she and husband Garth Wilcox sailed. They left Puget Sound in 2000 with no set itinerary and lived on the small, 31-foot boat for about \$33 a day. After roaming the Pacific for seven years, they sailed from Japan back to Seattle.

something that didn't cost any money," Hinman said.

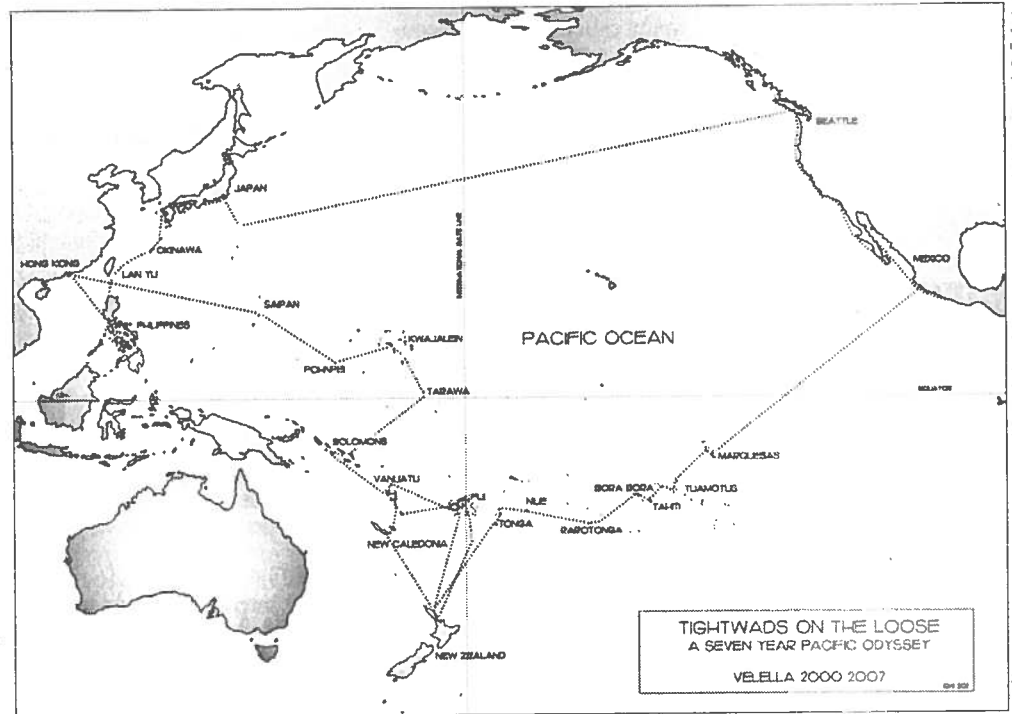
"Character-building experiences" waited around every corner. They weathered multiple typhoons, survived near-misses with cargo ships in the fog, and endured an electrical meltdown aboard Velella that waylaid them for months in the Solomon Islands.

They also made new

friends. It's the community of fellow wanderers Hinman remembers and misses most. At sea, people pitched in to help each other, she said.

"It's a great community of people," she said. "Here you'd never go change the oil on your neighbor's car. You do stuff like that all the time out there."

Hinman and Wilcox spent



TIGHTWADS ON THE LOOSE
A SEVEN YEAR PACIFIC ODYSSEY
VELELLA 2000 2007

years poking around the South Pacific, New Zealand and the Philippines, visiting nearly 20 nations in the process. Finally they sailed north to Japan and pointed Velella east. In the end, it was Hinman who wanted to keep going, while Wilcox was eager to return home and begin building a boat for another sea voyage, a boat with a little more space.

"I wanted to go on forever," Hinman said. "But then I could stand."

They sailed back across the Pacific to Puget Sound, a grueling, 49-day crossing capped by yet another storm. Hinman has spent the past few years adjusting to life on shore and writing "Tightwads," which was published in 2012. Wilcox, who works as a naval architect, is designing the boat for their next voyage.

When it's finished, they'll set sail again.

Until then, Hinman is content writing and speaking

about her sea travels.

"It's fun to share the story," she said. "It keeps it alive for me."

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