

Exploring the world for seven years

Wendy Hinman
talks new book,
life at sea

By **KATIE BURKE**
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University alum Wendy Hinman has seen very little footage of the Sept. 11 attacks. She missed the majority of the Bush administration and the advent of Facebook. Instead of experiencing these events on land, Hinman was sailing the Pacific Ocean with her husband in a 31-foot-long sailboat ... for seven years.

Hinman chronicled the adventure in her book — published in May 2012 — “Tightwads on the Loose: A Seven Year Pacific Odyssey,” giving readers an inside view of her life at sea.

“We didn’t have refrigeration, we didn’t have Internet, we didn’t have phones, we really just checked out for a while,” she said of her journey.

After graduating from the University in 1986 with a degree in economics, Hinman moved to Washington D.C., where she met her future husband, Garth. She followed him to Seattle, where they married and then started her own company in international trade. But the sailing adventure had always been at the back of their minds, as Hinman had

grown up sailing with her family and her husband sailed around the world with his as a teenager. Without the funds necessary for such an excursion, they settled into the daily grind of work on land.

Within a few years of working odd hours to keep up with the international markets — Hinman said she slept with a fax machine under her bed — she and her husband decided it was time to get serious about setting sail.

“We kind of had this unspoken thing of, ‘Someday, let’s go on an adventure,’” she said.

The two began to save up for a boat, eventually finding one within their price range. Though her husband could not stand upright in the cabin, it was declared sturdy enough for the voyage ahead.

The next step was to make the transition from life on land to life at sea. Hinman and her husband sold or stored what they couldn’t take with them and took a few trial runs in the new boat. After paring their life down to the essentials, and whatever books could fit in the space left over, the two said their farewells and set off, with no set destination or trip duration in mind.

In Hinman’s book, she provides snapshots into their day-to-day life. By using an anecdotal style, she’s able to depict the trials and joys of a seven-year voyage in

about 400 pages. Hinman kept a blog and wrote periodic emails to her family and friends during the journey, giving her a seven-year record to work with.

“I wrote the book out of order, with scenes as I was inspired to write them,” Hinman said.

The two experienced near brushes with total shipwreck, days on end with no wind and everything in between. Hinman wrote about these incidences but also added compelling descriptions of their natural surroundings.

“We just had time to notice stuff,” Hinman said. “Nature puts on this beautiful, spectacular show every day, and we just have to take time to notice.”

The two took continuous three- to four-hour shifts while sailing, one sleeping and the other keeping watch and maintaining the course. Books were the prime source of entertainment, and Hinman and her husband would see little of each other until they made it to port.

By the time they reached the other side of the Pacific, Hinman and her husband had experienced a complete voltage meltdown and were without any radio or other electronic equipment. A sailing friend had told them about a U.S. military base named Kwajalein on an island off Japan. Low on money and supplies, the two began to look for work. Hinman found a job with a website while her husband worked at building maintaining facilities — he even constructed a



COURTESY OF WENDY HINMAN
University alum Wendy Hinman spent seven years at sea on an adventure with her husband Garth.

vehicle to remove and store boats out of the water, still in use today on the island. After spending two years in Kwajalein, they returned to the ocean.

Once they left Kwajalein, they explored the islands off Hong Kong and Japan. Both history aficionados, they went from one World War II site to the next, visiting some locations — including the storage site of the

two atomic bombs — that have barely been touched since the war. Along with the tour through history, Hinman and her husband also traveled to islands home to populations such as the Kastom and Lan-yu tribes, who have little contact with modern society.

From there, they made the decision that it was time to make their way back home, and set sail toward Japan.

“My husband was like, ‘I can’t stand up straight. I really don’t want to look like Quasimodo when I’m done with this,’” Hinman said.

After seven years at sea, Hinman was back on land and entered into a much different society than the one she had left. Internet was now a norm rather than brand-new technology, everyone owned a cellphone and a new president was in office. Hinman said it wasn’t easy coming back, and she found she couldn’t go back to business as usual.

“Getting back was really rough; we really changed,” Hinman said. “I wasn’t really ready to go back to the 9 to 5 ... so I just started writing about the experience.”

Hinman worked with friends who had published a book while she was away, and week-by-week compiled her account of the voyage. She said she did not start the trip with the intention to write a book, but as she kept records of their unique adventures, the idea of putting it all together for publishing seemed appealing.

In addition to the writing

process, Hinman began speaking in public about her trip. She spoke to sailing groups and other interested parties — sharing pictures, anecdotes and travel tips.

“I’m finding that the public speaking helps with my writing too,” she said. “I’m up there with my pictures and stories ... and as I’m up there some stories bubble up into my mind.”

Hinman’s book broke the top 100 on Amazon in August and was first on the site’s Adventure/Travel list.

She said she continues to build her storytelling skills through more public presentations and participating in story slams. Hinman is set on starting a new project, writing a book about her husband and his family’s trip and their shipwreck in Fiji — which made national news at the time.

Her husband is currently working on his “dream boat” as the two prepare for their second major adventure. Again, no specific timeline has been laid out, but they plan on sailing around Chile and then onto the canals of Europe.

Hinman said her experiences at sea and in writing have given her a new outlook on life and letting go of what can hold you back.

“Taking risks teaches you that the things that scare you are scary while you’re cowering from them, but as soon as you say, ‘OK, I’m going to tackle that fear,’ they just vanish,” Hinman said. “I think failure is just giving up completely.”



COURTESY OF WENDY HINMAN
To prepare for life at sea, Hinman sold and stored most of their belongings.

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