

Vela atop a coral outcropping in the fall of 1974.

Nautical Nook

True Tales of Adventure

Sea Trials: Around the World on Duct Tape and Bailing Wire

Review by Greg Van Belle

At one time or another, we have all fantasized about casting off and sailing away to distant oceans and tropical islands. In August 1973, the Wilcox family did just that. With plenty of near-shore sailing experience in blustery San Francisco Bay, the family of four set off in *Vela*, a heavily built 40' sloop, toward Hawaii and beyond. Wendy Hinman, author of *Tightwads on the Loose*, brings us a very detailed story of the Wilcox family's circumnavigation in her latest book, *Sea Trials: Around the World with Duct Tape and Bailing Wire*.

A good adventure story has mystery, hope, challenge, and obstacles that must be overcome. Once those obstacles are dealt with, our heroes tend to live happily ever after. Unfortunately, most real-life adventures don't respect the three-act structure in which we normally see them packaged. While many authors will manipulate the storyline a bit – omitting details here, skipping ahead there – to mold their tale into a somewhat traditional story, Hinman sticks to the script, telling the story pretty much as it happened and making liberal use of the wealth of information available to her. She is married to Garth Wilcox, who was 14 when *Vela* left San Francisco, so her access to the

family's scrapbooks, clippings, photos, and manuscripts is complete. This accounts for the massive troves of detail – significant and not – throughout the book.

Telling true stories is very hard. Hinman assumes no mystery here. Understanding that the reader will know that the family goes hard aground on a reef near Tonga relatively early in their journey, and acknowledging that we all know they make it home safely, she opens the book by describing the shipwreck before flashing back to the outset of the voyage. We know what is coming, we just don't know when, and want to stick with the story for the payoff.

It is exciting and interesting to see the family grow into their sea legs and learn how to live at sea. It is fascinating to be transported back to a time not that long ago when GPS wasn't even a dream, and digital communication would have solved most of the issues the family faced. For sailors, this book is rich with information.

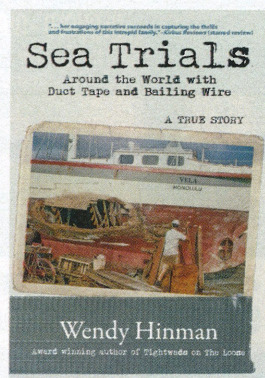
For the sailor or for someone dreaming of circumnavigating, this book reads alterna-

tively as an inspirational tome and a harsh warning. It is stuffed full of detail that gives the reader a real sense of the day-to-day of the voyage. The reader gets to feel as if he or she is on deck as the Wilcoxes learn to deal with open ocean sailing for the first time. We learn from their mistakes, such as spending time and money fitting their boat with a working fireplace, despite their intent to spend most of their trip in the tropics.

The high level of detail is also the main issue with the overall book. While sailors and boat enthusiasts can happily dwell in minute detail and extraneous information, it can make this book a little hard to sink into at times. There are threads that never get pulled and questions that never get answered. There are minor teasers that never get resolved. Throughout the book I kept finding myself either wanting a great deal more information or significantly less. The book is best as a sailor's story, less so as an adventure story for the general public.

Telling this story had to be a monumental challenge for Hinman. Her readers know the outcome before the first page, and the challenges the Wilcox family faces along the way do not lend themselves to tight, formulaic story structure. Even with her complete access to the family lore about the trip, telling good true stories and making them interesting is one of the

most challenging tasks a writer can undertake. Hinman's book is definitely worthy of a space on your bookshelf for a time at anchor when you can enjoy the immersion into the Wilcox family's adventure-filled trip around the world. Check out the author's website at wendyhinman.com for more details or to buy.



PLATYPUS
MARINE, INC.

The Pacific Northwest's Choice for Excellence

102 North Cedar Street - Port Angeles - WA - 98363
(360) 417-0709 - www.platypusmarine.com

Full Service Indoor Shipyard

Servicing Vessels up to 500 Tons

Refits ~ Repairs ~ Maintenance ~ New Builds

Recreational ~ Fishing ~ Commercial

Military

"Your Partner for an Exceptional Project"



NORTHWEST YACHTING

JANUARY 2018

VOLUME 3

