



# Sailing

Comes

By Scott Murray

# Naturally



The dude has taken 50,000 people sailing. 50,000. Really. So guess what? He's learned how to deal with people on boats and how to sail boats.

So who's the dude, it's Captain Tim McMahon of Gulf Charters, who surprise, surprise, hails from a sailing family, and has been around boats all his life. His paternal grandfather was the chief engineer for the Alaska Steamship Company, and he navigated the waters up from Seattle through the Northwest Passage into Alaska. In his spare time he was devoted to a 150-ft steam-powered car ferry he had converted into a party boat called the *Virginia V*.

Tim's dad caught the sailing bug too, possessing a steam-powered dory, with a wood-fired steam engine in the Puget Sound

pick-up truck in a dump unloading a truckload of prickly pear cactus when a voice said there must be a better way. So off to Hawaii the couple fled, where Tim quickly fell in love with the ocean again, and against his better judgment bought *Houhere* – which now sits off the coast of Koh Samui. She's a 42ft New Zealand-built Kauri, which was constructed in 1939. He later cruised the Pacific in her for seven years. When he bought her, she needed a lot of work, so he set out to make some cash, so he could refit her and live out his dream of circumnavigating the world with his wife, Naomi. (Tim still says that *Houhere* is the most beautiful boat he's ever sailed, but remember he's a timber-boat person).

*Houhere* is actually a famous boat in New Zealand; she's a heavy weather offshore sailing boat, which was built by its designer

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area. His dad even built a crib for Tim in the bow of that boat, where he used to sit in his sailor's suit. When Tim was 4, his family up and moved to Maine and that's where he became familiar with the boat he grew up with, a 19-ft O'Day sailing yacht.

Tim spent some teenage summers working on a fishing boat, and eventually meandered to Arizona, where he fell in love with and married a Japanese exchange student named Naomi, who had been studying at the University of Arizona. He had an epiphany while doing desert landscaping in Tucson. To hear Tim tell it, he was standing in the back of a

Arthur Robb for the Auckland-Tasmania Race. Tim says, "There's no room down below, she was designed to sail wet; give her the worst conditions imaginable and that's when she's happy." There's even a whole chapter of her in the book, *Little Ships* written by Ronald Carter and published in 1948. The wood with which she's built is called Kauri timber, and this is among the best boat-building timber in the world, but unfortunately the Kauri forests were depleted during WW11. Kauri only grows in northern New Zealand and is the second tallest tree in the world, the first being the Sequoia, but it takes forever to grow.

*Naomi at the helm, somewhere in the middle of nowhere (far left), Tim McMahon today going over dinghy operation with Gulf Charter students (left, photo courtesy of Todd Speer).*

Tim attended the Pacific Maritime Academy and earned his Merchant Marine ticket, allowing him to drive commercial boats. Then at 23, he became the lead captain for JADA Yacht Charters, a company which owned three classic timer yachts. One of the boats was called *Teragram*, which is Margaret spelled backwards. The boat was built for Margaret Hilton in 1910. (*Teragram's* unfortunate demise is a whole other story).

Tim was in charge of hiring all the crew and skippers for the other two boats (if you couldn't tie a bowline, you were quickly thanked for applying and shown the door). He did day trips from Keehi Lagoon to Waikiki Beach daily, seven miles each way, twice a day with all three boats. As Tim recalls, "This is where I got my sailing experience - it was in and out every day, rain or shine, no excuses, 50 people standing on the dock, there was no such thing as 'We can't go'".





Tim was prone to showmanship early in his sailing life. Here's an example of what he used to tell his passengers on those tours in Hawaii: "Good Morning, Ladies & Gentlemen, this is Captain Tim; I'll be your captain today. Before, we get under way; there are a few things we have to go over. First of all, I'd like to draw your attention to these lines going round the boat, these are called life lines, which are designed to give you safety and balance as you walk around the boat. They are not, however, designed to take your full body weight. If you forget what I just said, and you lean against them and they break, would you be kind enough to yell out your name as you go over the side, that way, we can take you off the ship's manifest as the Coast Guard likes us to return with the same numbers we go out with."

This went on for seven years. *Houhere* was moored nearby in Keehi Lagoon, and on days off Tim & Naomi would take her out sailing. The original intention was just do some day sailing, but then they realized that she could take anything they threw at her. This was cinched when he took her on a trip up to Homer, Alaska, confirming that she was indeed a great offshore boat.

While in Hawaii, Tim started doing deliveries, which at age 23 was a pretty cool thing to do. He returning many boats from the 2750-mile Trans-pac Race, whose crew had sailed downwind from California to Hawaii and didn't want to make the return voyage, which was a lot tougher as you had to sail from Honolulu, take a left around Diamond Head and head north 1,000 miles before you could even think of approaching California, which you did at around 40N where the westerlies filled in. Then you took a right and closed for the west coast as Tim recalls.

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*Samoa landfall (middle top), Naomi on watch (immediate left), Tim & Naomi in a lighter moment during their voyage (middle left), Houhere's gourmet galley (far left), Tim on the dock with Houhere (far top left).*



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*Houhere at anchor in Micronesia.*

Tim also did deliveries to Guam & Fiji, stopping in places along the way like Midway & Johnson Atoll, a chemical burning facility.

Tim and Naomi did a complete restoration of *Houhere*, stripping her bare and refurbishing her. The only thing they didn't change was the engine. Naomi was very hands on with the restoration, doing all the canvas work, and helping with the varnishing. Then when Tim turned 30, he and Naomi set out on a two-year circumnavigation of the world. All their friends were skeptical of the voyage except for Ben Thompson, who lived on his boat *Ala Wai* next to Tim in Keehi Lagoon and helped him design the interior of *Houhere*. The day before Tim left, Ben congratulated him for living his dream, saying he was one in a million to do so. That's been the basis of his life ever since.

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would go somewhere, someone would say "Have you been there?" and so they meandered – A LOT!! For example, when they got to Tonga, they had charts for the middle group of islands, Nieafu, and planned to spend a month there. But the couple ended up sailing there for 4 months, visiting the north and south group as well – which they didn't originally have charts for.

The philosophy quickly changed from "Hey, we've got to run around the world to we don't know when we will be back here, and so what's the point in rushing through it." And as time went on it became less important for them to hurry back to the lives they had led before. The longer they stayed out on the ocean, the more self-reliant they became. Naomi became a great crew and whatever the weather or sea conditions never failed to get the meals prepared. She pulled her weight and was a great sailing companion.

Alas, when Tim planned the trip from Hawaii, he hadn't bought any charts past Thailand, so they had planned to stop here and recharge the couple's batteries. The trip has taken them from Hawaii across the Pacific to Fiji, Japan, the Philippines around the Straits of Malacca to Phuket. Unfortunately, their relationship didn't last, and Naomi left Tim in Phuket, where he went on to skipper *Seraph* for Mark Horwood and then Phil Harper, before becoming a partner and the head of Gulf Charters Sailing School.

What a life. 🍷