

Gathering on the Bay 2018: A Rendezvous of Boat-Loving Women

By Jessie Mackelprang-Carter

I'd packed light for a weekend away, and my trusty backpack hung heavily over my shoulders. In my right hand, I clenched a bag woven of palm fronds, a gift made by a woman we met when we sailed to the island of Tanna in Vanuatu. A twinge of anticipation danced in my belly, as I hurried through the Tullamarine Airport toward my gate.

My destination: Port Stephens for the second annual "Gathering on the Bay."

Social media can serve as an essential resource for obtaining boating information and building community in a modern sailor's life. For females, I contend that Women Who Sail Australia (WWSA) is among the most valuable resources available. WWSA is one of several spinoff groups born of Women Who Sail, a Facebook group established several years ago by Charlotte Kaufman, an American cruiser who spent half a decade exploring California and Mexico aboard her boat, *Rebel Heart*, with her husband and daughters.

Like its parent group, WWSA is inclusive and welcomes women whose sailing resumes span the gamut of experience. There are seasoned cruisers, some of whom are still living the dream and others who've retired to shore; intrepid racers who have competed locally and internationally; day sailors; and dreamers. The group is a supportive corner of the internet, now 2,900 women strong, where female sailors can ask all manner of questions, from advice on engine maintenance to anchoring tactics to raising babies on boats. No topic is taboo, and important questions that might be balked at on other forums are welcomed. From managing menstruation or menopause afloat to weather and route planning, all aspects of life aboard are discussed on WWSA.

I was on my way to Port Stephens, NSW for the second annual "Gathering on the Bay", a rendezvous for women interested in boats to come

together and learn from one another, swap stories, and build friendships.

Gathering on the Bay is a two-day event that runs on a Saturday and Sunday in April, with optional workshops the preceding Friday. I flew direct from Melbourne to Newcastle and caught a ride to Nelson Bay on Saturday morning. Fourteen months after completing my transpacific voyage from Seattle and making landfall in Melbourne, I continued to crave being surrounded by sailors and immersed in conversations about all things BOAT. Lucky for me, Gathering on the Bay turned out to be a prime opportunity to reconnect with my sailing identity...

I stepped from the autumn sunshine of a pristine central coast morning into a cool room at d'Albora Marina. More than 50 women sipped coffee and buzzed with chatter about the days ahead – the energy in the room was palpable! Some had been accompanied to Port Stephens by their partners, but most had come solo. A few had sailed their boats from Sydney or other New South Wales ports, several had flown in from Victoria, and carloads had caravanned from Queensland. Two ladies hopped flights from the South Island of New Zealand and Charlotte Kaufman, the founder of WWS and most anticipated speaker, flew from the US to deliver the opening keynote presentation and speak about her family's at-sea rescue a thousand miles off the coast of Mexico.

The line-up of speakers was nothing short of impressive! I had to intentionally avert my gaze from Lisa Blair, who'd recently completed her Antarctic circumnavigation, and Viki Moore, the Kiwi from *Astrolabe Sailing*, lest I be identified as the awkward fan girl caught gawking!

Amy Alton from *Starry Horizons* took us on a 30,000 nautical mile photographic journey and Kerry Tait discussed provisioning. Roger Badham talked weather and James Bradshaw from Minards Diesel offered engine maintenance tips (see full program below).

Gathering on the Bay (continued)

While most of the events were exclusively geared toward women, there were options to keep men busy as well, including a safety at sea course and the option of joining for sunrise yoga led by Leanne Hembrow of Yoga4Yachties. Dinner on Saturday night was also a coed event.

As the sun sunk below the horizon, voices mingled and conversation echoed across the harbor to the tune of clinking glasses and laughter. Wine tasting ensured we all found our way to our favorite libation, and a silent auction was held to benefit Sailors with disABILITIES. Gathering on the Bay also marked the official refloating of *SisterShip Magazine*, an international publication for women on the water. First produced by Ruth Boydell 30 years ago, it has been brought out of drydock by Shelley Wright and Jackie Parry!

To sum it up, the Gathering was two inspirational days of learning...and it was damn good time! I turned up on Saturday morning this year, but make no mistake, next year, I'll arrive on Friday! Few

Victorians made the trek this year, but with so many avid female sailors hailing from this corner of Australia, word is spreading, and next year our representation will surely be stronger.

Mark your calendars, ladies; dates for Gathering on the Bay 2019 have been announced: April 5-7.

Resources

Join WWSA: Search Facebook for “Women Who Sail Australia”

Learn more about *SisterShip Magazine* and purchase the latest issue: www.sistershipmagazine.com/

About the author

Jessie and her husband, Neil, sailed 16,000 nautical miles from Seattle, Washington to Melbourne between September 2014 and January 2017 aboard *The Red Thread*. In early 2017, they docked in Melbourne, where they are currently working to refill the sailing kitty to resume voyaging. Read more about their adventures at www.svtheredthread.com.

WWSA Gathering on the Bay 2018: weekend seminar program (women only)

SATURDAY 7TH APRIL

- 7.30 Yoga4Yachties
- 8.30 Registration
- 9.00 Welcome
- 9.05 Charlotte Kaufman: Losing Rebel Heart
- 10.00 Morning Tea
- 10.15 Kristen Anderson: Patagonia to Australia
- 11.05 Minards Diesel: 5 things you should know about your diesel engine
- 12.05 Lunch/group photo
- 1.15 Launch of *SisterShip Magazine*
- 1.35 Poppy Moore: Sailing for Parkinson's
- 2.05 Pantanius and Nic Douglass: Cyclone Debbie and Hurricane Irma
- 2.35 Coffee
- 2.50–3.50 Lisa Blair: Antarctica Solo
- 5.30 Wine tasting and official Gathering dinner

VENUE: Broughtons at the Bay, d'Albora Marina, Nelson Bay, Port Stephens, NSW.

TICKETS: Seminar \$65 pp book at www.stickytickets.com.au/64200/wwsa.gathering_on_the_bay_2018.aspx

Dinner \$65 pp (men and guests invited) www.stickytickets.com.au/64715/wwsa.gathering_on_the_bay_dinner_2018.aspx

SUNDAY 8TH APRIL

- 7.30 Yoga4Yachties
- 8.30 Viki Moore: Cruising the South Island of New Zealand
- 9.30 Amy Alton: 30,000 nm to Australia
- 10.15 Morning tea
- 10.30 Roger Badham: Weather
- 11.30 Kerry Tait: Provisioning at sea—your first long voyage
- 12.30 Lunch
- 1.30 Kate Nairn (Tangaroa Blue): The Australian Marine Debris Initiative
- 2.00 Sue Freeman: Marine Rescue
- 2.30 Leanne Hembrow: Ocean lifestyle
- 3.30 Finish

*Program may be subject to change

WWSA schedule: [WWSA Gathering on the Bay 2018 schedule](#)

Gathering on the Bay (continued)



WWSA GTB 2018 Charlotte1: *Charlotte Kaufman describes her family's harrowing rescue at sea in 2014.*



WWSA GTB 2018 Viki1: *Viki (www.astrolabesailing.com) traveled from New Zealand to describe the cruising glories of the South Island.*



WWSA GTB 2018 Lisa & Jess: *There were no shortage of inspiring women at GTB 2018, with the infamous Lisa Blair being at the top off my list!*



WWSA GTB 2018 Amy & Jess: *Enjoying a beer in the sunshine with Amy from Starry Horizons (<https://outchasingstars.com>).*



WWSA GTB 2018 group photo: *Dozens of women made the trek to Port Stephens for GTB 2018.*