

# Book Two

*F L O T I L L A   C R O S S I N G   ' 9 7*

A JOURNAL OF THE

3rd  
Annual  
Flotilla  
Crossing  
'97

Written by  
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Photos: Robert Bassett

# Chapter One

**Saturday, August 9, 1997**

**3**:00 a.m. was the wake-up call. As the Commander of this flotilla, I thought it was necessary to get an early start. If we rally everyone at 3:00 a.m., we might be ready to depart at 4:00 a.m. and arrive mid-morning in St. Joseph.

Our destination this year was to sail directly over to St. Joseph, MI. We would travel up the coast to South Haven, MI, then onto Saugatuck and perhaps, if there is time, to South Holland.

*Alpha Rays*, *Love Button*, *H2O* and *Obsession* were ready. I had to make a phone call to Wanda, who was sailing with me.

I need to introduce the members of this flotilla, for the record:

*Purple Reigns*—Captain Pam Rice, Flotilla Commander; Captain Wanda Robertson, skipper of *My Tyme*.

*Alpha Rays*—Captain Al Thompson (*also rear admiral of this flotilla*). He was solo-sailing, but is to pick up Captain Yvonne “Vonnie” Nelson, skipper of *Von Voyage* in St. Joe.

*Love Button*—Captain Robert Bassett, solo-sailing.

*H2O*—Captain Rose Rogers and Captain Elliott of *Aminah*

*Obsession* — Captain David Davis and First Mate, Judith Davis

*No Fear*, a 22 foot Venture, captained by “Moe” would be coming along on this trip, too! We had some concerns about that. It seemed to be a last minute decision for them, but if they had the spirit—*may it be with them!*

Understand, that most in this flotilla are experienced sailors. Yvonne Nelson, Robert Bassett, and Pam Rice were all members of the first African-American crew of both men and women to race in the Mackinac Race in 1994. This crew of nine was captained by Captain William ‘Bill’ Pinkney, world-renown, solo-circum-navigator. The boat Upanayana (*Keeper of the Magic Flute*) was that of David Blackwell, also of the crew. Rose Rogers and Robert Basset are both active members of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Lance Lovely, an experienced yachtsman and mechanic. Myself and Wanda Roberston with twenty plus years of sailing experience; David and Judith Davis sailed the east coast for many years and shipped *Obsession* to Chicago to sail Lake Michigan where they currently reside. Al Thompson and Yvonne Nelson have sailed the entire Lake Michigan and part of Lake Superior several times. They have sailed for 40 days and nights at a time to various islands and through the Straits of Mackinaw, the North Channel and up into Canada.

We departed at 4:20 a.m. from Jackson Park Harbor. There was no wind, so we motor-sailed. There was a chance of a thunderstorm sometime today. The sail across to St. Joe seemed at the present, uneventful. *Obsession* had stayed in the rear and we couldn’t figure out why. Well it took Al to figure that David’s engine was on—but it wasn’t

in gear. He was truly sailing. We would *never* make it to St. Joe at that pace.

Robert, Captain of *Love Button* was solo-sailing and was staying in the lead. There was much controversy about our heading. Elliott was captaining *H2O* on this trip. He remained out in front and was navigating for the fleet—but the compass was off about 15 degrees. This wasn't good! 15 degrees could make a difference of landing in St. Joe or some other place.

About 2 hours off the coast of St. Joe, the seas began to roll and the winds picked up. We were about one mile offshore when it became very gusty. *Alpha Rays* appeared as though he was having difficulty furling in his new jib. He had picked up speed, when he should have been doing the opposite. *H2O* was sailing under jib alone; *Love Button* was motoring; and *Obsession* was under main only. *Love Button*, then, fell behind *Purple Reigns* and *Alpha Rays*.

Earlier, *Obsession* had radioed that his jib wouldn't furl. He panicked and wanted to cut the jib halyard. There were suggestions coming in that he should do all kinds of things. I radioed to *Obsession*, and explained that cutting the jib halyard would be a disaster, and that he should go to the bow, release the halyard and pull the jib down the track then tie the sail with cords.

\* \* \*

As we were entering the mouth of the harbor, which was very turbulent, with swells and churning waters, we were struggling to get the main down. *Purple Reigns* entered first, *H2O* and *Alpha Rays*. *Obsession* was still behind, along with *Love Button*.

We notice the Coast Guard was coming out of the

harbor as they had the previous year—not knowing Judith of *Obsession* had called them—for *Love Button*.

We had no idea Bassett was having a problem. He had lost a bolt to his rudder and he had been steering with his engine, which is difficult enough when seas are calm. The chop had increased. We hadn't heard any radio conversation of his plight.

Robert had nearly lost his engine and broke his foot, fending-off of *No Fear* (a no-no to use body parts to fend-off) who was trying to help.

The Coast Guard towed Robert in, one-half hour later with a 100 foot line (*the only way*).

As we are going through the rotating draw-bridge, we stayed to the right to see if we could spot Vonnie. "She is suppose to be here, already," I said to Wanda. When we passed the bandshell, we heard Vonnie calling us and waving. She hadn't been waiting long. We would have been here sooner, but... Now she could get settled in, on the *Alpha Rays*.

Robert called Lois to come pick him up. He needed to get x-rays and get attention, fast. Unknowingly to us, he had intentions, all along, to take the tiller back to Chicago and have it welded, get a cast put on his foot and return to finish the trip. Robert needed Moltrin. Although he had plenty of ice for his 'swill', he hadn't applied any to his foot. *No Fear* and its crew hung in there pretty good for such a small vessel, with four people aboard. The crew took all of their gas cans to the nearest gas station so they could re-fuel for their trip home. This was a sight. Three black guys walking through the streets of St. Joseph with two case cans apiece. Yes—they sailed over, to sail back.

Good luck!

We all got situated and settled in. We help secure *Love Button* and saw Robert off.

\* \* \*

Dinner that night was at the Holiday Inn, which was just at the top of the hill. Steak was the choice for the evening. Robert was our topic of discussion. That night after dinner, Wanda, David and Al took a long walk to help digest the feast. Everyone else turned in early and slept well.

## **Sunday, August 10, 1997**

Early, before dawn, there were light showers. Elliott is gone and will be back to join up with us in South Haven on Tuesday. Wanda, Al and I walked into town, to the beach and to take a visual of Al's new camp ground, just east of the second bridge. This is where we will dock the next time we come.

The day was cool, humid and overcast. There was a large Triathlon here in St. Joe this weekend. Runners and bikers from all over the country. We were surprised, that in a place like St. Joe, there would be such an event.

We will stay here until tomorrow. We need to know of Robert's fate—and *Love Button's*, too!

The skies were cloudy and there was ongoing rain. Everything was *very* damp. Wanda and I tried to keep things dry, but that wasn't easy. The humidity was just *very* high.

Later, we took a short bike ride to the St. Joe's sidewalk sale and back to the river. We prepared our dinghies to ride up the river to *Clementine's*, our favorite eatery here

in St. Joe. Rose, Al and Vonnie, in Al's dingy and Wanda and I, in mine. *Clementines'* is a great eating experience. The ribs are our favorite. Rose placed an additional order, *to go*.

It started to rain on our way back, but we were prepared with rain gear. Upon returning, Al, Wanda and Rose went for a late night walk through town and down to the beach.

Our plan is to go to Wolf Marine, when it opens—and leave for South Haven by noon. We haven't heard from Robert yet. We've paged him and left messages—we hope everything is O.K.

Vonnie may sail to South Haven with Rose—she shouldn't travel alone.

The last two days it has been damp with overcast skies.

## **Monday, August 11, 1997**

The morning is gloomy with easterly winds. The river is smooth; the temperature is about 65 degrees and it is humid.

Robert's boat is secured and I have left him a note on where to reach us. We prepared to go to Wolf Maine. Everyone is wearing rain-gear—boots included. Our bikes are assembled and we took off.

We stopped for muffins and coffee.

The rain is coming down as light showers. It's a rainy day and a perfect day to spend shopping. There wasn't anything *else* to do. We spent 3 1/2 hours in Wolf's—it was, and always is, an adventure.



We spent a minimum of \$150.00 each—There are six of us. There are those who spent much more. We end up with three shopping carts of merchandise! How were we going to get this stuff back? Wolf Maine volunteers to load the shopping carts in a truck and deliver them to the boats for us. Rose too! Rose loaded her bike and came back with the driver.

Wanda and I returned early and waited for the delivery. The truck soon arrived and we rolled the shopping carts down to the boats.

We decided it was time to have a bite to eat. I thought to myself, "Rose had that extra order of ribs she ordered from *Clementine's*..."

It is still raining.

I tried installing Rose's new compass—it is not fitting. We need a saw. This is a job to be done at South Haven. We will have shore power, there.

\* \* \*

A few hours later, Al, Wanda, and I decided to return to Wolf's. We boarded *Purple Reigns'* dinghy and motored up the river. This time, we took the tributary that branches to the north. We passed a huge grain freighter and docked along side a dock in an alley. We walked two blocks to Wolf's. It is still drizzling. Even though the temperature was to be 70 degrees, it still seemed damp—we could see our breath.

Upon our return, we decided to go to dinner.

Robert's back!



# Chapter Two

**W**e dined at the restaurant at the hill-top facing Lake Michigan, overlooking the park and a pretty sunset.

The rain had stopped and things were starting to dry out.

Upon returning to the boat, I discarded carpeting we had on the floor, it was holding some of the moisture we were trying to get rid of. I laid it on the grass. If the sun came out to dry—fine! If not—fine!, I'd find another throw. Later that night, we turned on the heater to take some of the dampness out of the air. Rose takes a room at the Holiday Inn. I watched TV and then fell off to sleep.

## **Tuesday, August 12, 1997**

*'Same as yesterday.'* Gloomy, rainy; light and intermittent showers; winds were from the east and the temperature is about 65 degrees. Today, we planned to leave for South Haven at 8:00 a.m. The carpet is still damp. I drug it under a tree and left it to dry. Maybe it will be here when we get back.

8:30 a.m. we departed for South Haven—gloomy,

69 degrees and raining lightly.

Captain Vonnie is sailing with Rose on *H2O*. We unfurl our jibs and head north 42 degrees. All jibs are flying and Robert is under jib and main. We are motor-sailing.

We had brief periods of down-pours. Other than *H2O* having a knot in her jib sheet, our trip to South Haven was uneventful.

At approximately 12:30 p.m., we arrived in South Haven. With it raining off and on, we moored, hooked-up our shore-power, erected our awnings and biminis and waited for the rain to subside.

\* \* \*

We found *Clementine's* in South Haven for dinner. 500 Phoenix Street. Wanda ran into a friend of hers, Carol. Someone she used to work with. They had sailed over too!

The sun was setting. The temperature was warm. It was an exciting moment—we would have a chance to dry out.

We returned to the marina and discarded the idea of going to the show. Some folks did, however. The major feature was a “sci-fi” movie, which didn’t appeal to most of us.

Elliott showed up and stayed overnight. We gathered on *Purple Reigns*, and it began to rain. After chatting for a while, folks turned in—it had been a very long day.

## **Wednesday, August 13, 1997**

Elliott’s gone again.

It’s a very beautiful morning. It was clear and crisp. The humidity was low. Wanda, David and I, decided it was

time to do laundry. Things had gotten so damp. I would leave before them and head over to the municipal laundry for boaters. This place was full.

I pondered for a while and met an elderly woman, perhaps in her eighties. She was feeding ducks, right there at the marina. I asked her if she knew where there was a local laundromat. I figured she'd know. I could tell she knew all. She gave me precise directions. After the directions, I was indebted—she began to ramble on about her life. She told me that there were two things she'd like to do in life. The first, I forgot; the second was to have a cabin in the mountains and live amongst the animals—she was eighty years old and retired 17 years ago! “*When and was this dream going to take place?*,” I thought.

I bid the elderly resident farewell, got on my bike and rode south up a steep hill. I rode for two blocks, into a black neighborhood, and took a left and rode a 1/2 mile, just like the woman told me.

The sun was out, the sky was *blue as could be*. The humidity was low and the winds were light. This day was long past due. We'd endured more than enough days of gloom and rain.

I found myself in front of the laundromat. I also found David and Wanda, half-way completed with their wash.

We finished our laundry and left for *The Dollar Store*. Wanda and I picked up a new throw rug and a few other items. Upon returning to the marina, we went for breakfast and shopping. Vonnie and Al rode to *Wal-Mart*, over three miles away.

Elliott's back. Lance shows up, too. Both decided to

take a group of folks up to Saugatuck by car. Rose, David, Rob and Wanda went, I stayed and cleaned the boat.

Later, Vonnie, Al and I motored up the Black River by dinghy. The river, by water, is so scenic and beautiful. I had no idea, that much building had been done. Most were condos and huge summer homes, complete with private docking and ramps camouflaged by trees. We traveled quite a ways—up to I-94.

By the time we arrived, everyone is back from Saugatuck, and Lance has gone.

Captain David has a wine party aboard *Obsession*. The party is delightful. Vonnie brings smoked oysters and mussels; there is cheese, crackers and a kinds of delicious wines from David's cellar. "Yummy!"

Evening came. Along with the dropping temperature, so did the sun. Folks started making plans. Rob, Rose, Elliott and Wanda go to the show. Vonnie, Al, David and I go to the *Vineyard*, an Italian place, for dinner. The garbage pizza we ordered tasted like garbage; David's salad was a joke—I don't think we'll go there again.

We walked back to the marina. Upon our arrival, we did some star-gazing and challenged each other on various constellations. The night was cool and crisp and the stars blanketed the sky.

Vonnie and Al took a late night bike ride.

It is time to turn in.

### **Thursday, August 14, 1997**

This was a great morning. Southeasterly winds at 8 knots. Folks got coffee, paid their mooring tabs and made other preparations to leave.

Rose of *H2O* and David (*Obsession*) fuel up.

Captain Vonnie will be sailing with Rose today on *H2O*.

A large tall ship, a 1642 replica of Columbus' ship, came into the harbor and docked not far from us. It was an excellent replica, and very authentic, right down to the crew's clothing. Its home was to be the Maritime Museum, here in South Haven, for a few weeks. We had read in the local papers that it was coming—we were lucky to catch it before we left.

*Purple Reigns* exited the harbor, followed by *Love Button*, *Alpha Rays*. *H2O* and *Obsession* have a half-a block start. Our intention was to motor—but winds are more easterly. *Purple Reigns* and *Alpha Rays* fly jibs. *Love Button* and *Alpha Rays* decide on both jib and main. *Obsession* and *H2O* are motoring. *Obsession* is sailing close to shore and *H2O* is the furthest out.

Cloud were rolling in, west to southwest at approximately 11:58 a.m. There was to be rain again today. We watched as large, anvil clouds were building in the southwest. We radioed *H2O*, who was now out of sight, to make them aware of what might come.

As we sailed south, we watched the storm pass to the south—Whewwww!

We reached St. Joe. *Obsession* was out in front and the first in the harbor. We tied up to our usual spot on the wall, at the bottom of the hill. *Love Button* has some unfinished business over at the Coast Guard station.

The discarded carpet was still there. It was almost dry, but smelled of mildew. I decided to leave it.

We agree that we'd go to Clementine's for dinner. We rode our bikes.





# Chapter Three

## Friday, August 15, 1997

Lynne, Elliott's wife, had arrived. Elliott, Rob and I went to down the lake, for there are some questions as to whether we should leave. The seas were high. It had stormed earlier this morning.

At 9:20 a.m., the seas were choppy. Reports of 68 degrees, 3-6 foot waves, rain, and winds of 15 -25 miles per hour. There were also small-craft warnings out until late afternoon.

The consensus, was that we would stay in close and motor all the way. The winds were from the south—the direction in which we were traveling. Unless we wanted to do a lot of tacking, this was the best alternative.

Going out of the channel was rough—there were sailboats out, though.

The trip to Michigan City was rough for the first 3 hours—up one wave and down the other. The average wave appeared to be 5-6 feet. Half-way the trip, the waves subsided to 3 feet. The sun tried to come out and the temperature was rising.

*H2O* is still out of sight. Elliott is at the helm.

We reached New Buffalo. The water was calmer, as

we passed the entrance. We arrived in Michigan City after 6:00 p.m. that evening.

Robert was out in front. *Alpha Rays* and *Obsession* appeared to be racing each other. We were about 10 minutes behind and *H2O* was behind us 15 minutes.

We tied up at the south end of the Yacht Club—at Tom's Place.

"There's the carpet," I exclaimed to Wanda, "right in front of Al's boat." There it laid, on the side of Al's boat, like a welcome mat. One man's trash, is Al's treasure. We left for dinner to *The Lone Star* next to *Matty's* (ya-hoo place), a steak house.

Not long after we returned from dinner, the lightning began. There was more lightning than anything. There was no rain and no thunder.

## **Saturday, August 16, 1997**

3 - 4 a.m. this morning there was a severe storm. At 6:00 a.m. it was still storming.

About 6:30 a.m. we were awakened by Elliott wondering what time we were leaving for Chicago. I had to check the forecast. Winds were 10-20 knots, waves were 3-5 feet. The temperature was 80-90 degrees.

We decided to 'go-for-it'. The winds were expected to change and come from the north at some point early afternoon—bad news!

Vonnie and Al were staying—good for them—as you will soon see. They would have been a couple of hours behind us. They had plans to go back north to New Buffalo, Tuesday.

Wanda and I made a trip to the pump-out at 6:30 -

6:45 a.m.. We came out and circled, waiting for *Love Button* and *Obsession*. I had a lot of anxieties. I felt, we mustn't waste another minute. *My mind tells me right*. There is a threat of storms this afternoon.

The seas are choppy and the winds are gusting. We raise the main and part of the jib. We're heeling 20-25 degrees. There is a hazy sun. Winds are from the south-southwest. We are sailing now.

The winds began to change. We try to sail close-haul, but the jib was luffing and we did not wish to tack. Our motor is on and we were trying to make time. We sailed with the main for another 2 hours, then it began to luff. We took down the main. We were now averaging 4-5 knots. Land is always in sight. Our heading is 270 degrees.

The sun is out and it is hot. The flies are terrible. There were several species of insects out, including butterflies and grasshoppers. This is definitely not good. Most boaters will experience insects attaching themselves to boats when the barometric pressure drops. This means storms are on the way.

We could see the south shore and the crib. The clouds are rolling in—the sky is hazy. There appears to be a race going on outside of Jackson Park Harbor. When we entered the harbor, Rob was already tied up. The heat was intense. *H2O* and *Obsession* were about 20 minutes behind us.

We docked along the wall, so we could load the cars. Wanda and I were pulling into the slip, when the weather turned for the worst. The skies blackened quicker than I had ever seen. We tied *Purple Reigns* in her slip, jumped into the dinghy; we had Gloria open the ice house

so we could store the lockless, borrowed dinghy; and I snatched off the engine. By this time the rain began. Wanda and I dashed into the Yacht Club and ordered a sandwich—*Wheewwww!* *That was close.* It was a good thing Al and Vonnie stayed in Michigan City. The windows facing the lake gave us a view of the lake we've never seen. The lake was black and waves had swelled to 8 feet, at the shoreline. The sky was black. Darkness had come so quick, the streetlights came on. Rain was coming down horizontally, trees were laying down. I couldn't believe all that we could have been caught in. "...*Let us pray...*"

This was a good trip, in all. We missed a lot of storms, and had a lot of rain. We managed to sail in-between the bad weather. We were *very* lucky and our timing was good. It made better sailors out of us. Captain Rob did good. He persevered and deserved a medal. Captain David of *Obsession* built-up his courage.

We're all looking forward to the 1998 Flotilla Crossing.



*Part of the crew of the USCG that rescued Bassett in St. Joseph, MI*

*Bassett on the way to St. Joseph, MI aboard "Love Button" approximately two hours before arriving in St. Joseph.*





*The group poses in front of Purple Reigns at South Haven, MI before setting out for the day.*



*Replica of Columbus's ship arriving in South Haven, MI to visit the Maritime Museum.*



*The Coral Gables, our docking preference in Saugatuck, MI*



*David Davis, Lance Lovely and Elliott Amin on dock at Tower Marine in Saugatuck.*

F L O T I L L A   C R O S S I N G   ' 9 7



*Wanda Robertson, Rose Rogers, David Davis, ElliottAmin ,Lance Lovely and  
oa guest ,in Saugatuck.*



*Rose Rogers and ElliottAmin (at the stern) heading north up the coast of  
Michigan.*



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