



Advice from a MERMAID

Be calm in a storm • Drink like a fish • Sea treasures in simple things • Avoid shallow living • Make a wish upon a starfish • Explore your own depths • Don't get tide down • Avoid pier pressure • Write your secrets in the sand • Make waves

Mermaid Memories

Capt. Alison Osinski

I grew up around the water, played in the water, learned to swim and fish at a very young age, and had an early fascination with boats.

I grew up in Ohio.

(no—not Iowa, that's the state with all the cornfields) For those of you who are somewhat geographically impaired, Ohio is a Great Lakes state, bordered for 312 miles on the north by Lake Erie and on the east and south by the mighty Ohio River. And, there are lakes everywhere – 8.8% of the state (in comparison 4.8% of California) is water.

I learned to respect, but enjoy the water immensely. Water has had a dramatic impact on my life.

- It shaped who I am.
- It influenced my hobbies, how I choose to spend my spare time, and where I go on vacation.
- It paid for my education. It helped me develop unique skills.
- It led to a successful career.

- It allowed me to travel the world and have adventures that most people will never experience.
- It brought joy and appreciation of natural wonders to my life.
- Most importantly, it introduced me to like-minded friends who also love being in, on, under and around the water.

I have photos of myself before age 2 sitting in metal washtubs splashing water with joy as grandpa looked on. I remember my fascination with the decorative, colorfully illuminated fountain, strolling out on the pier over the water, and the Over the Falls water coaster boat ride at the long gone Euclid Beach Park. I remember playing in the waves and on the sandbars at Cedar Point before the famous amusement park was there. I remember catching my first big fish (a catfish in Neptune Lake) at age 4 using a plastic toy fishing reel and string, purchased at a dime store. Once a year, my Dad's boss invited the family aboard his large cabin cruiser for a visit. I remember my enthralment with that boat, and announcing to my parents that I wanted one of those too.

I've owned a lot of boats over the years. All my boats have been named after mermaids. Currently, the mermaid fleet consists of Mermaid – a Beneteau Oceanis 400 sloop, Ariel (the little mermaid) – a Ranger Tug R21-EC, a dinghy Phosphorescence (follows in the wake of a mermaid), and 2 kayaks Wars and Sawa (Mermaid and her lover that the city of Warsaw is named after).

I was fortunate to be able to grow up near the water, and have a large extended family that spent their summer weekends, holidays and vacations at the beach. When I went away to college, I was lucky to discover, almost by accident, that I could study something I was passionate about – aquatics. I stuck with it, and 9 years later, had a Ph.D. in a rather unique field that eventually enabled me to do what I really like for a living. I took boating and sailing lessons and got qualified to operate a variety of types and sizes of vessels. I attended boating safety seminars. I started teaching and coaching: small craft safety, boat handling, sailing, canoeing and kayaking, crew. I took jobs that involved operating boats. I learned how to take care of, and maintain, a variety of vessels. I learned to sail larger boats. I got certified as an

instructor by several organizations. I got a bareboat charter certificate. I got my USCG captain's license, with sailing, towing and STCW endorsements (and have renewed it 3 times).

Also, because of my watery interests, I've been blessed with my Mermaid friends – a wonderfully diverse group of aquatic professionals, talented friends, relatives and colleagues who (probably like most of you in this room) love the water too. We are the lucky ones, who are able to truly enjoy our water planet.

But why do we get so much enjoyment from being on the water? Other people have hobbies, but for many of us – it's a lifestyle.

In his NY Times best seller "**Blue Mind**", author Dr. Wallace J. Nichols writes that science supports the idea that mere proximity to water can enhance one's physical and mental well being, and how being on or around the water has real neurological and other healing benefits. We are made of water. The human body is 60-78% water, and our brains about 80% water.

Like the Human Genome Project of a decade ago that mapped human DNA, scientists today have joined forces to try to map the human brain by tracing the neural networks. The Connectome Project is being funded by NIH and a consortium of universities. Scientists like cognitive neuroscientists, neurobiologists, and psychologists are using diagnostic tools like EEGs, MRIs, fMRIs, PET scans, SPECT scans – machines which are becoming smaller and more portable so research can be done outside the laboratory and in natural settings. Machines can detect and record and map brain scans, by measuring electrical activity or increased blood flow to identify when different areas of the brain become more active.

Scientists are measuring what we already know instinctively – something magical happens when we are around the water. We lose our sense of location and passage of time when out on the water. We can watch the water for hours and not get bored. We forget what day it is. The sparkling, glistening, shininess and motion of water mesmerizes us. It has a distinct feel, and a subtle aroma.

Modern life in urban environments causes us to be overstimulated and hypervigilant. Our “always on” lifestyle is stressful and damaging. Our frontal lobe (the part of the brain associated with hyperawareness, executive function and cognitive control – attention, reasoning, problem solving, planning...) needs a break. When we sail, or spend time on the water, areas of our brain associated with emotions, pleasure, and empathy can take over providing a calming influence. Our brain releases a steady stream of natural opiate, feel-good neurochemicals like dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins that give us that calm, peaceful, euphoric feeling. While at the same time, epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine that speed up heart rate are not being released. We need to day dream, to space out, to just relax.

The Mappiness Study of 22,000 people in the UK used a smartphone App to track people in specific environments. Researchers found that where we are affects how we feel, and that just being in maritime or coastal regions added 5.2% to a persons level of happiness.

Proximity to water strengthens the positive effects that environment has on well being. People want to live by water, and vacation next to it, because of its restorative powers. People want to be by the water and are willing to pay more to do so. Vacationers will pay more for that hotel room with a view of the water, and any real estate agent will tell you, the most valuable phrase in the English language is “ocean view”.

Water features, and even indirect exposure to water has recuperative powers. Photos and videos of water help hospital patients feel better and recover faster. Viewing fish in aquarium tanks in dentists offices calms nervous patients. The most Alexa enabled skills on Amazon Echo and Echo Dots (Amazon’s voice enabled artificial intelligence speakers, controllers and information providers) are having Alexa play the sounds of moving water, rain or ocean waves.

Just being around the water improves our mental health, and choosing to sail can make us happy. And, happiness affects our genes reducing biological markers known to promote increased inflammation linked to development of heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

I work as a recreational water aquatic consultant, and because I learned to sail and steer a boat, people have actually paid me to do some things I would have done for free, like:

- Run day sailing trips, whale watching trips, and corporate regattas
- Provide boating education & instruction (private, community classes, university level, and conferences): keel boat sailing lessons, boat handling skills and safety drills, electronic instruments, navigation and rules of the road
- Participate in races and rallies: Several Baja Ha-Has, Sail Sea of Cortez Week, Newport to Ensenada races, Sail Asia Rally – Darwin, Australia through Indonesia to Bali
- Do sailboat deliveries along the Pacific Coast ranging from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico to Monterey, California
- Paid to sail while advertising (Bud Light Lime Boat) for SASS Sailing Media
- Provide litigation support services as an expert witness in about 65 boating cases from PWCs to cruise ships
(Probably only person to ever testify in San Diego Superior Court wearing a wetsuit – PWC orifice injury case – back on the witness stand after a field trip with the jury to Mission Bay)

I've also been able to participate in some activities out on the water because of my boating skills:

- Race crew member (fore staysail trimmer) aboard the 1930's schooner Skookum III
- Mission specialist aboard the research submarine Antipedes with Oceangate and the Undersea Voyager Project. We dove to a depth of 747 feet east of Ship Rock, Santa Catalina Island. Our dive plan was to: identify ecologically significant targets in two underwater canyons, and collect video and SONAR imaging
- Sailed as a crew member aboard the tall ship The Californian from Dana Point, California to Hilo, Hawaii
- Steer the African Queen (one of the boats used in the Humphrey Bogart / Katharine Hepburn movie)
- Sail up the Niger River to Timbuktu
- Steer a cruise ship while gray whales played on the bow wave

- Sit in the captain's chair on the bridge of a Navy amphibious assault ship as she came back in to San Diego Bay
- Write my name in bioluminescence (like sparklers) while sitting in a circle with friends on the bottom of a lagoon at midnight.
- Watch a video of the dinner scene in Disney's version of "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" while eating lobster and key lime pie in an underwater habitat, with lobsters watching me through a porthole.
- Sailing in the Team ANZUS Regatta in Sydney Harbor
- Watching America's Cup races up close outside Pt. Loma and inside San Francisco Bay just a few feet away from the action
- Thrill of milling around in the old glory days, before the start of the Newport to Ensenada International Yacht Race, with 600 other sailboats trying to stay out of each others way
- Exploring islands
(climbing abandoned lighthouses, getting chased by a thundering herd of big horned sheep on Rattlesnake Island, collecting Petoskey stones off Pele Island – fossilized coral pebbles formed by glaciers)
- Watching the lightning show over Lake Erie or the dance of multiple water spouts off Miami
- Having hurricane parties on board a research vessel while sitting out storms in the Bahamas during a month spent chasing spotted dolphins

After a lifetime of sailing, I think I've learned some lessons worth passing on to all of you:

Lessons learned from a lifetime of sailing:

- Before you jump out of the boat, make sure you can get back in
- You'll never gain confidence in your ability to sail across oceans if you only go out sailing on perfect weather days in light winds and calm seas
- When sailing conditions are perfect – keep going
- Sailors have short memories
- It's a small world afterall

- Coincidentally running into colleagues (aquatic directors from the Ohio State University) while SCUBA diving under their glass bottom boat on the Great Barrier Reef, 12,000 miles from home – then later that same day sitting down to dinner on the small cruise ship across from clients from Desert Hot Springs
- SCUBA diving in Alor (Indonesia) and running into clients from San Luis Obispo
- In Panama waiting to transit the canal with friends (dock neighbor Peter Wragg, pizza dinner – Dianna said to say hi, met during a Baja Ha-Ha, anchored next to another Hendershot – Rob’s cousin from Canada)
- Cruising and racing sailors are just different from each other
 - Racers will constantly trim the sails to get that extra 1/10th of a knot of speed.
 - Cruisers will change course so they don’t have to get up and adjust the sails
- The 3 most asked questions by non sailors are:
 - Aren’t you afraid of pirates?
 - What do you do at night?
 - What do you do all day?
- I’m grateful for diesel engines in sailboats
- Having “boat hair” isn’t the end of the world
- The adventure is in getting there. Don’t be in a hurry.
- Planning the trip is half the fun
- Cruise ships do not just come out of nowhere
- Komodo Dragons can swim (Komodo National Park Komodo, Rincon, Flores Islands in Indonesia)
- There’s nothing better than being securely tied up in your slip on a stormy night and tucked into a warm, dry, cozy bearth reading yourself to sleep as you listen to the rain pound on the deck of the boat above you
- Sailing is aquatic therapy
- You’re never too old to have a rhythm band parade (George Pearson)
- Blame the imaginary crew member “Dawn”
- Delegate and assign responsibility

(Crew members will lobby for specific jobs whether dinghy captain, pyrotechnics specialist, or mixologist and try to avoid the dreaded head mistress, or sanitation engineer assignments)

- When things get really rough, try to keep everyone occupied and their mind off the unpleasant seas
(I'm sailing to Catalina and I'm taking an aardvark, banana, calendar, diamond...)
- Eat well
- If you ever get the chance, jump overboard and swim with the dolphins
- Laugh 'till your sides hurt
- I should have given my crazy Key West neighbor Mel Fischer \$100 when he asked me to invest in his Treasure Salvors company – a couple of years before he found the Atocha and became the most successful sunken treasure hunter of all time
- Jellyfish pulse through the ocean and never tangle their tentacles. Lines properly coiled and stowed still manage to turn into a mess of knots.
- Encourage team work
 - Crew shirts, songs, traditions, favorite tables at restaurants, temporary mermaid tattoos...
 - Have a cheer – “Old girls gone wild, woo hoo!”
 - Have a secret wave – Elbow wrist, elbow wrist, flick your hair and blow 'em a kiss
- Have celebrations
(Pirate day: drink rum and dress and talk like a pirate
Hawaii Day: wear grass skirts, leis, play ukuleles, dance the hula to the hula
Queen of the sea: dress in mermaid, crowns
Dress up for an elegant dinner at sea: wear your sarongs
Full moon celebration: howl at the moon, drink tequila, skinny dip around the boat
- After spending 30 days with someone on a small boat you'll either be best friends or enemies
- Cruising guides are always expensive. But, the best money I ever spent was on a cruising guide that helped me find a tiny outcropping near Point Sur where I could anchor for the night when I was exhausted from fighting 40 knot winds and big swells on a sail up the coast to Monterey.

- Understanding why ancient mariners thought the earth was flat and they could sail off the edge – the “flat dish phenomena” is so obvious when sailing far away from land.
- Always pay your Vessel Assist bill
- There’s no bigger thrill than jumping off a boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in 2,500 feet of blue water for a swim
- Sailing a coastline at 5 to 6 knots leaves the features of that coastline embedded in your mind. Later when you fly overhead in an airplane at 500 mph (or do a simulated Google Earth flyover), you can spot minute geographic details and exact locations where you’ve anchored.
- Be safe — do drills, wear your PFD, harness and tether at night and in rough weather (Winnie-the-Pooh was right: “In case of sudden and temporary immersion, the important thing is to keep the head above water.”)
- Every sailor I know has this instinctive, emotional response of joy and elation when they watch that scene from the movie “Capt. Ron” when the sails fill with wind, the boat is crashing through the seas, and they’re sailing rather than just motoring for the first time after leaving Saint Pomme de Terre.
- Do a 10 minute clean-up every morning
- Watch the sunrise. Watch the sunset. Hope you’re lucky enough to see the green flash.
- Play games. Start tournaments.
- Teach everyone aboard something new every day. Learn something new from your crew members every day.
(It could be a craft, a song, a recipe, a saying, trivia... doesn’t matter. You’ll forget most of it, but a few of the things will stick with you for a lifetime – form a ukulele band, learn the words to the song “Da Moose”, have tequila tastings, Play-Do sculpting contests, learn why Otis Redding couldn’t possibly have been “sittin’ on the dock of the bay”...)
- Bob Bitchen was right: “Paradise isn’t a place – it’s a state of mind.”
- Document, log, photograph, DVD – and enjoy your adventure over and over
- I wish I had unlimited time to sail, and could drop anchor in a different location every night

You can participate in water activities at all ages, and you’re never too old to learn to sail. You can learn to sail at age 8 in a Sabot sailing dinghy, or at 60 in a 40 foot keelboat. Like

acquiring any new skill: take some lessons, join your friends and soon you will achieve a level of competence where you no longer have to think about your performance – you can simply enjoy yourself. You'll gain self confidence, and a more positive outlook on life. You'll feel the tension draining away, and the gentle rocking motion of the boat will help you start to slow down and unwind. If you share your sailing adventure with others, you may learn something about trust, and teamwork, and you'll have some shared adventures and seriously addictive experiences.

Blue Marble Project

Our planet is mis named – It shouldn't be called Earth, it should be called Ocean. Imagine that famous photo of earth as a blue marble, taken from outerspace in 1972 by astronaut Harrison Schmidt, when he and Eugene Cernana, and Ronald Evans were aboard Apollo 17 traveling toward the moon for the last time. Or think of Carl Sagan's famous description of Earth as a "pale blue dot". Hold out your marble at arms length. This is what Earth looks like from millions of miles away. Put marble to you forehead and imagine a person to whom you're grateful – someone who loves the water, someone who taught you to sail, or someone who inspired you to take that risk and sail out of sight of land, someone responsible for your best day ever spent out on the water. Hold it to your heart and image how passing on your marble will make the recipient feel. Give your marble to someone, and tell them how much you appreciate them and what they've done for you.