

Spacing
Summer 2007
Liveaboard
By Jay Somerset

It's the end of March but it feels like winter. Cold wind and rain ripple the plastic tarps covering the 50-odd boats moored at Marina Quay West, just west of Lower Spadina. The boats look like floating trailers. *Loopholes, Sea Wolf I, Blame it on Buffet*. Looking north, million-dollar condos dot the skyline.

About 80 people call this home, renting dock space from the Toronto Port Authority for about \$580 a month. Some leave in mid-April, mooring across the lake on Toronto Island for the summer months. There are couples, kids, divorced men clinging onto their sole possession (the ex got the condo), single women, and dogs. Your typical Toronto neighbourhood.

Liveaboard Lynn Kaak, wearing khaki shorts and a yellow raincoat, greets me and invites me inside *Silverheels III*, the 30-year-old sailboat she shares with her soon-to-be husband, Ken Goodings, for brunch. I take off my shoes and climb down the wooden ladder into the cozy hull. We're sitting around a built-in wooden table eating scrambled eggs, toast, bacon, and coffee with Bailey's. Pillows double as closet space, stuffed with sweaters, T-shirts, towels. Their single bed sits on top of 28 gallons of diesel fuel. Behind me, a built-in bookshelf houses sailing books, magazines—"We get a lot of boat porn," says Lynn—and a bottle of Appleton's Jamaican rum.

"People always assume we're cold, but if we don't pay attention to the heat, we'll quickly climb to 28 degrees, especially on a sunny day," says Ken. This is their fourth winter living on a boat in Toronto. "There's less socializing come fall, except when the wind really whips up and everyone comes out of their boats just to hold onto something that isn't moving."

Welcome to winter living on the docks, a far cry from the iconic Margaritaville or the Florida Quays, where tanned, sandy-haired sailors moor and drink rum punch. It takes a salty soul to climb out of bed in January and check that the ice isn't freezing too close to the

boat. “There’s the constant hum of space heaters and bubblers, like someone left running a powerful hose,” says neighbour Judith Schutz, who lives next door on her 30-foot sailboat, *Entre Amis*. In February, the entire marina froze because the bubblers were put in too deep. “Ken and I spent all day breaking up ice and hauling it away. I remember thinking, I’m not doing this anymore.”

Winter isn’t all work. Judith shows me pictures of the skating rink they built and played hockey on (“The landlord wasn’t happy with us”); there’s a picture of Ken cooking back bacon on a propane stove (“We’re in toques, clutching hockey sticks and eating back bacon—how Canadian, how un-boatlike, is that!”); the next photo shows someone stuffing a Christmas tree into the ice (“It sank on St. Paddy’s Day”). It’s small-town living in downtown Toronto. “One neighbour’s girlfriend came over last summer and tossed his power tools into the water, which we all saw. If you have someone spend the night, the whole community knows—the boat rocks a certain way.”

Most of the socializing happens in summer, or the first warm day, when the tarps are removed and the barbecues are lit. “We’re on the family dock, and it’s fair to say the next dock over is more party-oriented,” says Ken. The marina office houses several showers, toilets, and laundry machines. Paperback novels are borrowed and donated. “Everything’s community. Community showers, laundry, toilets, docks, water. “If you don’t clean up after yourself, or you leave a mess in the laundry room, or you let your dog intimidate people on the dock, you won’t last.”

Etiquette is key: don’t come aboard unless invited; take your shoes off. “For the most part, everybody gets it and we have a great time,” says Lynn. “Lots of potlucks and barbecues. If you need to borrow tools, you know who to ask.”

The only people who don’t “get it” are dirt dwellers, liveaboard lexicon for people who live on land. “When you move into a new house, people bring you housewarming gifts,” says Judith. “I got a used toaster oven, used towels, used sheets. I had one visitor who crumpled up his chocolate bar wrapper and threw it into the boat. ‘I’ll pick it up later,’ he said. Can you imagine doing that in someone’s house?”

The longer you live on your boat, the less visitors you have, says Judith. “People think of us as freeloaders but we pay rent like everybody else. The condo owners don’t like to look through their expensive windows and see the boats. They think we’re a gypsy encampment.”

“Houseboats are especially despised,” adds Ken. “It’s the boats at Bluffer’s Point in Scarborough that people hate. These are floating homes that never move—they can’t, there’s no engine.” Mobility is a requirement at this marina. “It’s why we’re here. To sail,” says Ken. Even though the furthest they’ve been is Hamilton, they’re not worried. “Ken has to learn how to drink French-press coffee and we’ll be fine,” says Lynn.