

## European shakedown



Barb Sprenger

**Above, voyagers Con and Barb Sprenger exploring on land. At far right, the Sprenger's Nauticat 515 Big Sky under sail.**

**B**arb and Con Sprenger, two Canadians from land-locked Calgary, Alberta, have been sailing together for just two years. In April 2007, they tossed off the lines the moment the Baltic Sea thawed. They were in Turku, Finland, where they bought their 515 Nauticat sailboat, Big Sky. Con has sailed all his life. Barb's sailing experience has involved one sailing course, two charters, and two years living aboard and voyaging.

The Sprengers retired early, gave away most of their possessions, and leased their house to live aboard Big Sky and sail into the sunset. Unfortunately, Con couldn't fully retire until March 2009, working from

Big Sky's pilot house scooping WiFi from port to port.

Con was born in Holland after WWII, spent his youth in the Sea Scouts, and got his formal training in the Dutch Navy. He emigrated to Canada 39 years ago with \$1,700 in his pocket. Today he is a shareholder in Eagle Pumps and Compressor Ltd., a successful pump and compressor company.

After a successful career in public affairs, Barb became a founder and was the National Executive Director of the Kids Up Front Foundation of Canada, a charitable organization. With the help of donors and a board of directors, she grew the charity from an idea to an organization serving thousands of kids in need across Canada.

Together they have toured 20 countries, so far. They have sailed through winds peaking at 50 knots in the North Sea, sail-surfed on a 15-foot wave into an Italian marina; battled cross-winds in an Estonian marina while caught on a Russian anchor, managed 40-foot tides on the Atlantic coast, and were nearly swamped when stuck in tidal mud in France.

**ON:** What prompted you to go voyaging?  
**B&C:** We both have a huge curiosity about the world and a keen desire to explore it, so it really came down to "by land or by sea." Sailing around the world was a childhood dream of Con's, so there was no question that one day he would do it — by sea. I loved the idea of traveling like a turtle so to speak, with our house on our back, tucking into various communities and getting to know the culture and moving on. Seeing the world from port to port is the most fascinating thing.

We arrive usually right in the center of the old towns, and set off on foot or bike to explore. There's something magical about using the waterways as our highways. You're one with the heavens and if you're lucky, dolphins come to visit at your bow, whales can be spotted, flying fish, exotic birds. Sometimes those highways can get really rough though and have come with challenges, but it adds to the realness and rawness of what we're doing. Voyaging in this time of our lives is like the icing on the cake of an already beautiful life.