



# As The *Crow* Flies

by David Treadway

**S**weating and grumpy, I was lugging two five-gallon cans of diesel down a dusty mountain road when, coming around a corner, I caught sight of the sweet sheer line and glistening black hull of my old Luders 33 *Crow*. She was swinging gently at anchor in Ingonish Harbor on Cape Breton Island, about to embark on another seasonal cruise. I stopped and gazed fondly at the boat that had been my family's home for the past 18 summers. From Scotland to the Caribbean, Newfoundland to the Chesapeake, *Crow* had carried us safely through hard winds and thick fogs, all the while forgiving her skipper's occasional errors.

Soon, two crew and I would head for the Strait of Belle Isle on

On a summer cruise with his family, a sailor attempts to come to grips with his decision to sell a well-loved boat

the first leg of this summer's adventure. My wife and two sons would join the boat at St. Anthony on Newfoundland's northeast coast. Circumnavigating Newfoundland was to be the final cruise on *Crow*: The children were growing

up, tuition bills needed to be paid, and I had decided it was time to say goodbye to my beloved boat. I looked down at her and felt a lump in my throat.

My crew arrived at midnight and we set off to cross Cabot Strait. As we inched our way past the unlit buoys, the boat began to roll in the ocean swell. The insistent tapping of halyards promised a good breeze, and the moon painted a patch of silver on the water. The old excitement of putting out to sea swept over me.





*Despite the forecast northwesterlies, we still had to contend with fog as we pushed up the west coast of Newfoundland.*

We pushed hard up the island's west coast, trying to stay ahead of a gale intensifying south of us, rushing by the dramatic cliffs and fiords of Bay of Islands and Bonne Bay and leaving ourselves time for a glance and a click of the camera shutter. On the fourth night out we entered the Strait of Belle Isle. With northwesterlies forecast I wasn't really worried about fog, but as luck would have it a dense, gray curtain dropped just as we entered that nether region between safe harbors. We spent an anxious night taking turns at the bow and squinting into the mist for icebergs. (The *Sailing Directions* for Newfoundland, Labrador and Hudson Bay note, "Ice usually clears the first half of May, but may remain much later." Indeed, there can be ice and bergs around Newfoundland through the summer, especially on the northeast and

west coasts. Radar is recommended when cruising here. Ice charts can be obtained by way of fax from the Ice Operations Center. Call 709-772-4580 or 709-772-2078 for more information.)

Dawn brought relief in the form of clearing skies. Whales and dolphins played around us as the sun danced on the water and reflected off snow that still clung to the hillsides even in late July.

During a stop at Raleigh, a small fishing village at the head of Ha Ha Bay, we were visited almost immediately by local fishermen. One young man with his daughter in tow took us under his wing to show us the town. He talked of hard times, the fishing industry shutdown and everyone out of work. He showed us a shed filled with old engines, traps, fishing gear, and a net spread over several sawhorses.



"Lately I been working on this cod net," he explained. "We can't fish for nothin' anymore, but my granddaddy always said you gotta keep your flint sharp and your powder dry. So might as well mend the nets, but nobody knows if we're ever gonna get to use 'em again." When we pulled away from the wharf, he cast off our lines with practiced ease while holding his little girl in his other arm. "I bet you'd like to go with those fellas, wouldn't you, darlin'?" he asked her as he waved goodbye.

As we beat along the bleak coast toward St. Anthony and my waiting family, I thought of the generations of fishermen who'd supported their own families from the sea. I thought of the ravaged Grand Banks and how tragic it was that this seafaring culture had been forced to turn its back on the ocean. The destruction of the richest fishing ground in the world in just 20 years is the equivalent of the coal miner's canary—a warning for all of us.

The wind was blowing hard out of the northeast, we were enshrouded in fog, and it was cold enough to wear ski gloves and hats. It was not a particularly inviting beginning for the two-week "family" leg of the cruise. "We're all going to die," announced my wife, Kate, as she and the boys drove up to the dock at St. Anthony.

"No, we're not, dear," I replied reassuringly. "We won't sail in weather like this. We'll just do reasonable, fair-weather sailing."

"That's what you always say and, besides, your definition of fair weather is anything less than a hurricane," she countered.

I hugged her and reflected on our sailing years together. Kate had never sailed before we met and in our early years I subjected her to all manner of discomforts: from harrowing passages in wretched weather to permanently damp sleeping bags and worse. After our first summers aboard *Crow*, I was lucky still to have a wife. But following years of negotiation, Kate and I have developed a workable sailing compromise: I do the ocean passages on my own or with friends and Kate and the boys join me for gunkholing in exotic, far-away places. This summer would skew the arrangement somewhat, because we had 400 miles to cover to get to St. John's, with the possibility of hard sailing in a region of often unpredictable weather. On the Newfoundland coast, the marks are few, the hazards are many, and the potential for summer gales is high. Our last family cruise—I hoped for an easy passage.

Sam, 10, and Michael, 16, each greeted the prospect of two weeks on the boat with Mom and Dad in age-appropriate fashion: Within five minutes of their arrival, Sam an-

**Crow's crusty crew: Sam, David, Kate and Michael**



nounced he was bored and Michael said he was going to sleep and please just wake him for the plane ride home. I looked at them and attempted to infuse some enthusiasm. "Come on, guys," I wheedled. "This is going to be great!"

"Right. You've dragged us all to some godforsaken hell hole where it's raining like stink and it's so cold you can see your breath and we're supposed to be enthusiastic? I don't think so," Michael wisecracked.

"And I'm probably going to be seasick the whole time," added Sam, the eternal optimist. God bless teens and preteens. I began to remember why selling the boat might be a good idea.

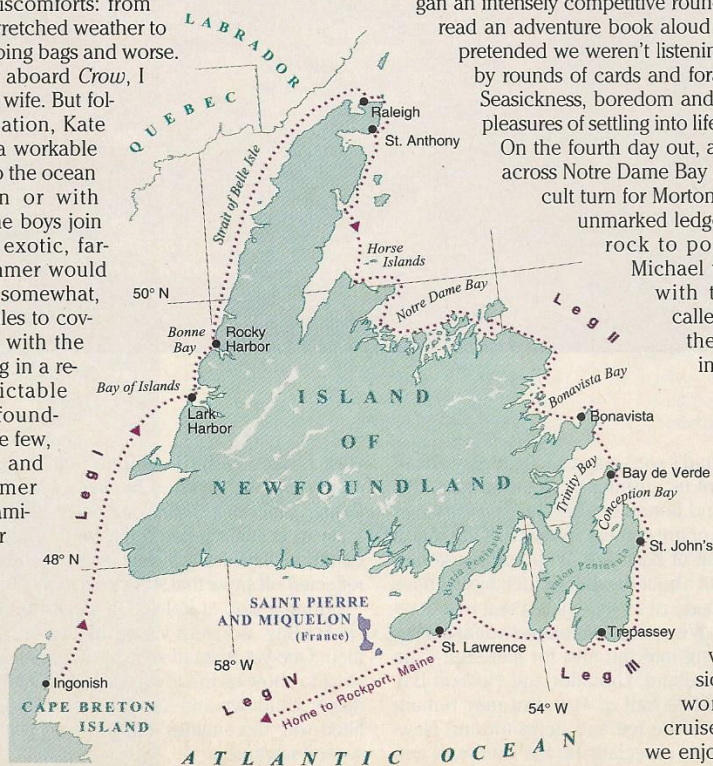
Dawn brought 25 knots of wind and a cold, stinging rain. I tried to work my way into the good graces of my mutinous crew by declaring a lay day. We headed off to L'Anse Aux Meadows, the site of a Norse settlement from the 10th century. Standing on the windswept tundra, looking past the sod houses to the Labrador coast beyond, one could imagine intrepid sailors from another time looking over this same vista. We toured the huts of the settlement; they seemed surprisingly comfortable. Each building had housed about 40 people, each skillfully constructed of multiple layers of wood, bark and sod. "It's not as hard to imagine living in a place like this as I would have thought," I remarked.

"That's because it's just as damp, cramped and cold as the boat," teased Kate with a grin.

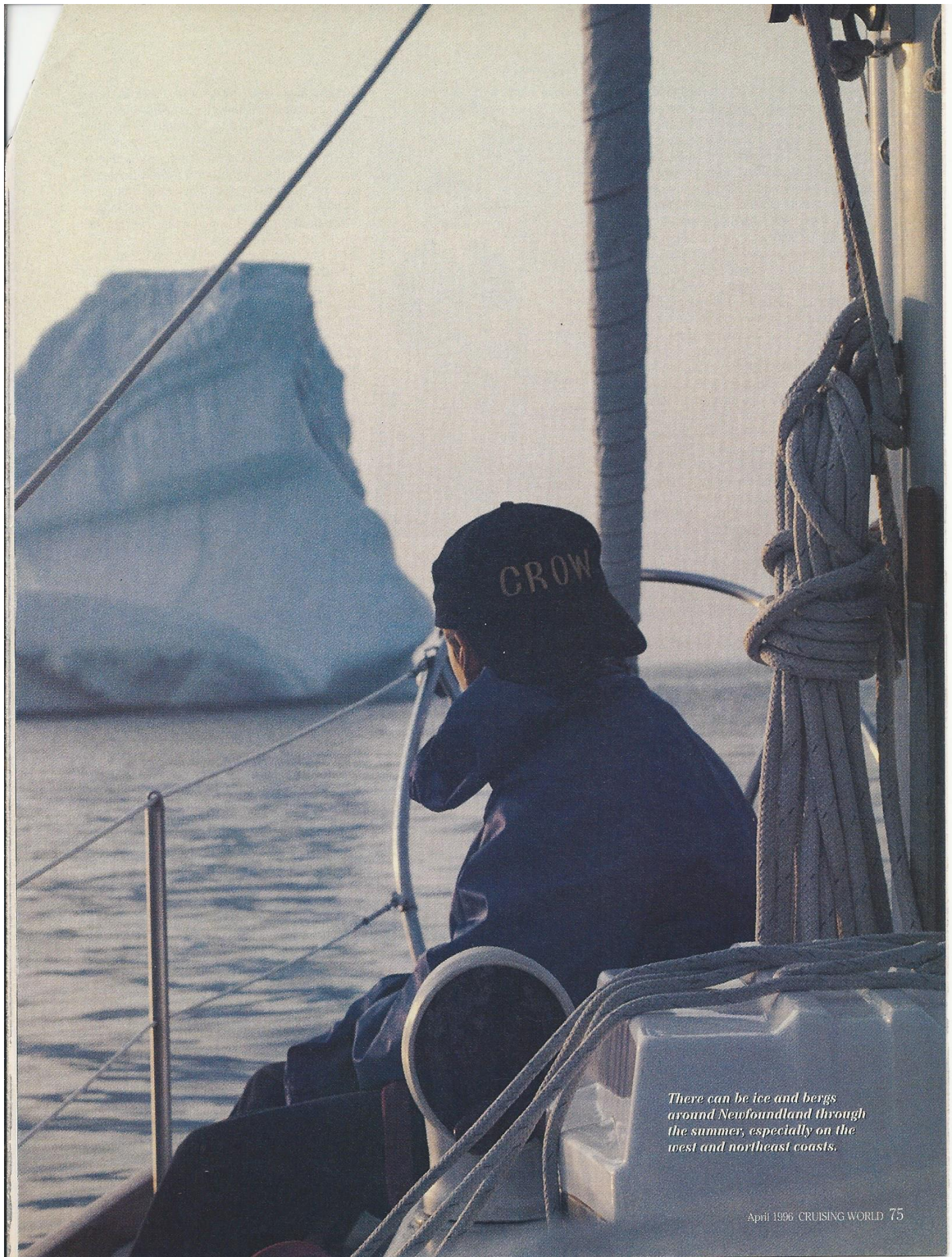
Slowly, over the next few days we eased into a familiar, easy sailing rhythm. I got us under way at the crack of dawn each day while Kate and the boys slept, which allowed us to stop early for the night. During each day's sail, we were overwhelmed by an abundance of whales, dolphins, birds and icebergs. The boys and I began an intensely competitive round of chess tournaments; Kate read an adventure book aloud to Sam while Michael and I pretended we weren't listening. Evenings were capped off by rounds of cards and forays into our chocolate stash. Seasickness, boredom and complaints gave way to the pleasures of settling into life afloat.

On the fourth day out, after an afternoon of blasting across Notre Dame Bay at 7.5 knots, we made a difficult turn for Morton's Head Harbor, avoiding an unmarked ledge to starboard and Mad Moll rock to port. Kate was at the helm, Michael was on lookout at the bow with the binoculars, and Sam called out depths while I studied the charts and checked bearings. What a team!

That night, as I sat on deck and watched a sliver of moon rise out of the water into a night sky glistening with stars, I listened to my family horsing around below and considered how special our time together each summer had been. Ashore, it's difficult for our family to gather together very often without the intrusion of TV, friends, school and work. Yet each year on our cruise we rediscover how much we enjoy each other. "I can't stand







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the idea of selling *Crow*," I whispered aloud in the dark. And yet, I thought, seasons change, children grow, and merely keeping the boat wouldn't ensure that precious moments like this would last forever.

The four of us voted unanimously that Newport Harbor would be our next stop. We entered a narrow cut that sliced through walls of barren rock, which then opened into a perfectly protected harbor. This once-flourishing fishing village now consists of only a couple of cabins; we were visited by a family of four as soon as the anchor was down. Glen, Carla and their two little boys were the only people living there year-round. Anxious for company, they came alongside in their dinghy for a gam. A self-reliant pioneer family making a life in a ghost town, they lived a rugged existence that made our adventure seem as tame as a Disney ride.

They told us about a long pond, reachable by dinghy, at the head of the harbor. We worked our way among the rocks and shallows to find ourselves floating on a still, sapphire-blue pool under an almost-matching sky. For a few timeless moments we let the dinghy drift and lapsed into a shared silence. Grace happens.

Later, as *Crow* sailed from the harbor, Glen and Carla came speeding alongside. "We baked you some bread," Carla said, passing over a steaming hot loaf before waving goodbye. We were touched to the core. Newfoundland is a dramatic and splendid cruising ground, but it's the people that draw a visitor back. All summer we were greeted by folks who opened their homes and hearts to us.

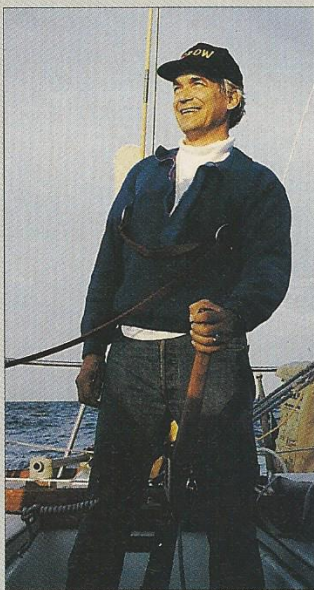
We had hard sailing with winds on the nose as we made our way across Bonavista, Trinity and Conception Bays to St. John's. Beating to windward was hard on all of us, but weather reports suggested that there was another storm brewing, so we kept pushing. Plane schedules and other deadlines had begun to intrude on our cruise. After a particularly long, hard day, we rounded Cape Bonavista in fog so thick you could hear the surf and see the backwash from the cliffs without seeing the headland at all. I was tense and snappish. Kate retreated to her book, Michael to his CD player and Sam to mal de mer. "I hate this boat!" he said with fury as, one more time, he banged into the chart table. I suspect that in that moment we all did. The sea is a constant teacher of the same old wisdom: For every full tide, there's an ebb. It is a lesson I am forced again and again to relearn.

That night we tucked into the tiny harbor of Bay de Verde, which was full of fishing dories packed together like sardines. We skipped the nightly card game and took our irritable selves off to our bunks early.

In the early morning fog, I took a walk through the town and was struck by neatly tended, freshly painted homes juxtaposed against boarded-up houses belonging to out-of-work fishermen. Even though it was early, a cluster of men already loitered around a closed convenience store. They greeted my hellos with shy glances and barely perceptible nods. I felt their shame. They belonged at sea.

Schedules dictated that Kate and Michael leave the boat at this point for home, so family friend Henry Becton, his 10-year-old daughter, Eliza, and Sam were the crew for the next leg, around the Avalon Peninsula to Saint-Pierre. It promised to be a hard leg, with winds on the nose and the likelihood of considerable fog. Fortunately, Henry is a very competent sailor.

**David at the helm of *Crow*. They'll sail together again this season.**



Unfortunately, both children had serious bouts of seasickness culminating in one miserable day in which we had to beat into 30 knots of wind for six hours. Henry eased the time for the kids by reading *Peter Pan* aloud, but finally we were reduced to singing "a hundred bottles of beer on the wall" maniacally while waiting to be able to fetch the mouth of Trepassey Harbor.

We made great progress until the last day when, on the way to Saint-Pierre, the engine died. I suspected dirty fuel was the culprit, and changed the filter. Unfortunately, while doing so I managed to get air in the fuel lines. Despite desperate attempts to suck the lines clear, I couldn't bleed them properly. We turned back toward St. Lawrence, tacking into a slight breath of air. Just at the mouth of the harbor, the breeze died completely, causing us to be driven down on the headlands by the strong current. Anchoring was not an option, thanks to the depth, but something had to be done quickly. I clambered into the Avon, hooked up its 2.5-horsepower engine and attempted to tow *Crow* to safety. For awhile, it was hard to tell whether we were making any progress against the current. Finally the sails filled a little; eventually, we caught enough air to fly the spinnaker and ghost up the harbor in thick cottony fog.

*Crow* and her crew were adopted by the town of St. Lawrence. An excellent diesel mechanic fixed the engine, replacing an injector among other things. The local motel let us shower, did our laundry and loaned us a car for shopping. But Henry, Eliza and Sam had a plane to catch in Saint-Pierre; with hugs I dispatched them to catch the connecting ferry.

I still had 600 solo miles to go, down the long Nova Scotia coast and across the Gulf of Maine to *Crow's* homeport. Watching the Newfoundland coast fade into the horizon, I felt waves of sadness. There was a sharp bite to the breeze. Summer was ending. *Crow* was homeward bound on her last voyage. Memories of past passages spliced together in my mind. I thought of the long days alone crossing the Atlantic 13 years ago. I remembered my sons on early family sails tucked into a Snuggly on my chest while I manned the helm. I reflected on my dream to sail *Crow* one day across the Pacific to New Zealand and beyond. How I loved this old boat! I sat there a long time, feeling *Crow* find the rhythm of the wind and waves, watching the bubbles disappear in her wake.

It is the dead of winter now. *Crow* is buried under a foot of snow. I spent the fall talking about selling the boat and grieving the loss of my faithful partner in almost 20 years of sailing adventures. I have tried to get excited about the ease of chartering or a family vacation in the Rockies. But I just can't do it. The boat is in my blood. She owns me. Kate just chuckled when I tried to explain. She knew all along, she said, that I wouldn't be able to do it.

Soon there will be the sound of honking geese moving north across the pale blue sky. Slender shoots of crocuses will poke through the receding patches of snow. Then it will be time for me to head to Maine with sandpaper, varnish and cleaning equipment to open another sailing season, and to begin yet another chapter of my life with *Crow*.

Family therapist Dr. David Treadway has been a sailor since childhood. Over the past 20 years he has cruised extensively from Newfoundland to the Caribbean and has sailed trans-Atlantic to Scotland. He is the author of *Dead Reckoning: A Therapist Confronts His Own Grief* (Basic Books, June 1996) and lives in Weston, Massachusetts.

### Further Reading

**Coastal Cruising Newfoundland** by Rob Mills (Harry Cuff Publications Ltd., St. John's, Newfoundland), \$21.95. **The Cruising Guide To Newfoundland** by Alexander Weld (self-published, 211 Ash St., Weston, MA 02193), \$41. **Sailing Directions (En route) Newfoundland, Labrador And Hudson Bay, 6th Edition** (DMA Hydrographical Topographic Center, Bethesda, MD), \$19.85.





*The sweet sheer line and glistening black hull are only part of what makes the author wax sentimental about Crow, his family's floating summer home for the past 18 years.*