



Marina life at Vuda Point, Fiji. *ICE* (foreground) will be here over summer — then head for Tonga for those wrecks! I'm looking for scuba diving crew (see www.bluetreasure.me).



A 12yo Jessica Watson off the Gold Coast (already in her team's colour pink!) and dreaming of adventures to come.

FOR KIDS' SAKE

Don is back in marine suburbia with liveaboard families as neighbours, reminding him of the early life of one solo sailor, Jessica Watson

“Wow! Happy New Year! What happened to last year?” so say most of us, who are thinking about adventures for the 2012. Stay safe, be in good health and good luck!

When editor David Lockwood approached me a couple of years ago to write this column, I asked him what he was after? He said adventure! I thought “Wow! Okay” that leaves it wide open. Still, sometimes I sit and stare at a blank page, the copy deadline fast approaching! Hmmm... what will

I write about? Often I give up and pick it up a few days later. Right now I sit thinking, “What will I write?”

Then the pilothouse of *ICE* was filled with laughter from the kids next door.

I am about to fly out of Fiji, headed for another Antarctic season on the expedition cruise ship *Orion*. I have enjoyed six weeks of marina life at Vuda Point. It is one of the best cyclone holes in the Pacific (touch wood!). Cruising boats have been converging here to hole up for the summer, like me, or check systems and sail to NZ or Oz, or maybe head north across the equator.

WHEEL OF LIFE

Marina life is really good! It is a breath of fresh air, very social, an extension of the cruising life and a lot of fun. It has been many years since I have experienced it, surrounded by a vibrant bunch of diverse cruising tragics, all with interesting hats and stories of their adventures, past and present.

The Vuda Point marina is a big circular hole with 80 boats rafted up around the edge. Bowlines go to a central monster mooring, like spokes in a wheel, so you are close. No unfriendly concrete pontoons. It's more like being rafted up at the yacht club following a regatta.

Japanese, Ukrainian, German, French, Swedish, they're all here, with the mix of boat types and crew ages too large to talk about. If you have a problem, you are offered plenty of advice, opinions and help. Everyone says “Bulla!” You do not have to be retired to appreciate that this slows your life down in a peaceful way. You don't need a car and the lawns here are not your problem! But here on the marina, parents cruising with kids are what inspires me.

The lifestyle rubs off onto children, sort of like programming a computer. For them, every day is a new adventure. They are active, their challenges are real, their responsibilities are tangible and they can see how important that is. They learn.

They absorb culture, humanity, survival, fun and excitement with their own senses. They use them all, sight, sound and touch, *not* just through a computer screen or

fabricated scenarios or by watching TV. They make their own value judgements and risk assessments daily. Woohoo! Mini adventurers. It is so good to see.

HEY, NEIGHBOUR!

The Swedish couple next door in their late 30s have three tanned, blond-haired kids, all under seven — two girls and a boy. They have been on the road for more than two years, in an early '80s 13.5m GRP racing yacht with a flush teak deck and a pinched-in bum. It is littered with all the cruising stuff that goes with a voyaging life and three kids. What a family.

The kids are so cool, outgoing, friendly, uninhibited, fit, happy, inquisitive, smart and responsible. Yes they were still kids, but I looked at them and thought, “What will they be doing in 20 years?” No one knows the meaning of life, but with a start like that, they will surely make a success of it.

THE WATSONS

Then I received an email from Roger Watson to say “Hi.” He was selling his boat *Home Aboard*, a Pacific 50 motorcruiser (here in *Trade-a-Boat*, of course!). It had been Jessica Watson's home for more than five years, cruising every inch of the Queensland coast. It had been my home for a few days, too. That was in early 2009 when I sat down on the huge aft deck with the whole Watson family, discussing the ramifications of what may happen if I bought a boat for 15-year-old Jess to sail solo around the world. It was a fun time, with plenty of laughs reminiscing about life aboard.

Julie and Roger had programmed their kids on this boat, while living the cruising life. There were four: Hanna 6, Tom 8, Jessica 10 and Emily 12. Their life was anything but normal, certainly not suburban and always real. Like everything in life, it has an upside that comes with a price. Like trying to your get emails



IF YOU WANT TO BUY JESS'S CHILDHOOD HOME, THEN YOU CAN. IT IS A BIG BOAT, ASKING \$295,000 AND ACTUALLY 52FT LONG



Home Abroad (left, foreground), a Pacific 50 and home for the Watsons for more than five years, at Lizard Island, their favourite place. Cook's Lookout is behind, heading into the clouds, where Jess had to run to dump her emails! Below left: Anticipation, opening distance-education school work, delivered in the mail, on the huge (4.5m x 5.5m with hardtop) aft deck of *Home Abroad*. L-R, Jessica, Emily, and Hanna.

out. I will let Roger explain...

"In late 2006, we spent a month or so anchored at Watsons Bay, Lizard Island (Old)," says Roger. "We had a dodgy laptop with a battery that wouldn't last. It was very funny, as Emily and Jess would type-up their emails, jump in the dinghy, row ashore, run along the beach, then run/climb like crazy all the way up to Cook's Lookout to get a mobile signal from the mainland, just to get the emails sent before the battery went flat."

So, if you have kids think about it. Do them a favour. You'll have fun too. Do it in a sailboat or a powerboat, big or small. Do it before you lose the kids.

Home Abroad was the platform that Roger and Julie used to fuel the imagination of their children. Without imagination you cannot dream. If you want to buy Jess's childhood home, then you can. It is a big boat, asking \$295,000 and actually 52ft long.

Roger sent me some details of the boat's features, including: Twin Perkins 6354.4 engines fully rebuilt with 750 hours on the clock, 17.5kVa genset Yanmar/Koler alternator rebuilt, boat fully rewired, new bottom (planed back and re-glassed), Raymarine electronics, full air-con, two dinghies — 10ft Walker Bay (with sail kit and 3.3hp Mercury plus crane for launching) and a 3.4m hard-floor rubber ducky (with 18hp Tohatsu on stern davits). All clears, covers, and biminis recently replaced. Boat completely refitted inside, carpet replaced in saloon now four times — thanks kids! The Pacific 50 cruises at 9.5kts at 1650rpm consuming a total of 20lt/h, while 12kts has a fuel-burn of 36lt/h.

She seems a bargain when you consider that the Walker Bay sailing boat was Jess's first adventure sailboat. Your kids would love to own that. They could sleep 'n dream in Jess's bed. So, make a plan. You too could live a boating life in an uncertain world, on a level and at a pace that makes sense... especially, if you have kids! 🍷