

Rockin' and Rollin' — on the Water

Kayaking's real adventure is getting in and out of the boat

BY FAY JACOBS | ILLUSTRATION BY ROB WATERS

My father always said: Nothing is ever so horrible if you wind up with a good story to tell. I reminded myself of that the first time I got wedged in a kayak.

I love kayaking except for two things: getting in and getting out.

My first adventure was on a tributary of the Bay of Fundy in Canada. As my mate and I schlepped toward the river bank, dragging two heavy kayaks behind us, I was already questioning my sanity.

Then, at water's edge we dropped the vessels into the bay and mine started to leave without me. When I hurriedly stepped into the boat with one leg, the kayak launched itself downriver, pitching me backwards, and slamming me down into the kayak cubby like Whack-a-Mole. Both my hips and thighs took hits, while my right leg

hung over the side, dragging along like a rudder. By the time all of me was in the boat, I realized my paddle was still on shore. Yes, I was literally up the creek without one.

As my spouse's boat neared and we made the paddle hand-off, bruises had already popped up on my hips. But I was eventually able to relax a bit and try paddling. Surprisingly, I could propel the craft forward without tearing a rotator cuff.

I held the paddle in the middle, noticing, on my right, a little rubber ring just above the flat part that goes into the water. When the paddle rose from the bay, the ring deflected running water away from me. Excellent. Only the other side didn't have such a ringy-dingy and the running water poured directly into my lap. And it was chilly. I wondered how long it would be before mildew set in or bailing was required.

But it was peaceful on the water. For a while there, kayaking put the fun back in Fundy.

But, of course, we had to come back. And while we were gone, the infamous Fundy tides had receded, making the path to our launch site a quarter of a mile of murky sludge. When I tried to extricate myself from the boat I couldn't pry myself up. Clearly my bruised hips and thighs had swollen a trouser size larger from the entry wounds.

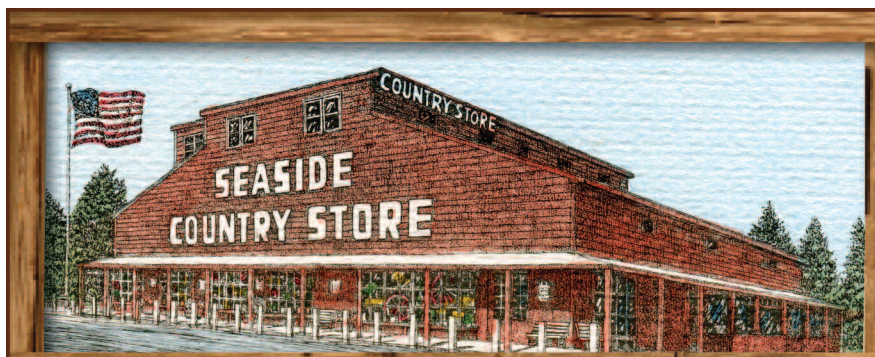
My struggling inevitably tipped the kayak and I capsized into the sea of brown goo. That sucking sound was me lifting my head up, my Ray-Bans staying behind. At least I was able to sink my hands into the gunk and drag myself, on my belly, out of the kayak and crawl the 30 yards toward shore. Staggering up onto the bank, I was a half-dead ringer for the Creature from the Black Lagoon.

For some reason, in Nova Scotia, we kayaked again. Our guide told us to get into the boats from a standing position, in knee-deep water. This time, I fell in just as badly but much, much faster thanks to the insanely frigid water.

When the instructor described a safety maneuver to right a flipped boat, he called it the Eskimo Roll. Fat chance of my being able to do that. I'd be going glug-glug with the fish, doing a sushi roll.

But I have to say, the scenery on this trip was gorgeous, kayaking along rocky inlets and stunning vistas. Although for the whole adventure I obsessed about having to get out of the damned boat.

And the resulting experience lived up to my fears. Once again I couldn't dislodge myself on my own, so I did a Reverse Eskimo-Roll, leaning over the side and sliding out of the boat, landing on my hands and knees in 6 inches of chilled water. I got a glacial facial




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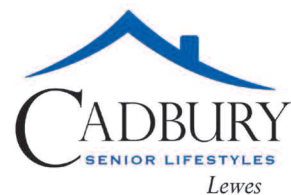


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and complimentary hypothermia. For future reference I should restrict kayaking to warm-water venues and hire a personal trainer to haul my ass out of the boat.

Glutton for punishment, but in a warmer climate, we most recently joined a dozen women of a certain age kayaking on a Florida canal. As we all got ready to launch our boats, we were given little square seat cushions with sturdy handles on two sides.

"We'll use them later to help get you up out of the kayaks," our guide said. "They're called Lady Lifters." Wow, clearly I was not the only one who needed a new exit strategy. I might, however, have been the only one thinking it was a sexist name for the little pillow with handles. Offensive name or not, I knew I'd appreciate the assist. As for getting into the boat, at least there was now a padded seat when I came crashing down.

We explored the canal for two hours, enjoying the tropical foliage, blue herons, ibises and what appeared to be a floating meatloaf, but was actually a manatee.

Along the bank we spied an enormous snoozing alligator and I paddled by with as little gusto as possible. This was no time for premature eject-u-lation. When the gator opened his eyes and took a step toward the water I froze, but mercifully, the gator stopped in his tracks. We were paddling toward our lunch stop and I wanted to eat lunch, not be lunch.

After a wonderful afternoon, we returned to the boat ramp. When it was my turn to disembark, two muscular women waded ankle deep in the water, to either side of my kayak. They each grabbed a seat cushion handle and on a count of three lifted this lady up and toward shore like Queen Victoria in a sedan chair. Success!

Knowing that a dry landing is now possible, I'm ready to tackle Rehoboth Bay and the canal to Lewes. But first, do you know anyone who can take an old seat cushion, sew extra-strength handles onto it and make me a Person Lifter?

Then I'll be ready to rock and roll, Eskimo or otherwise. ■

FAY JACOBS is the author of the books "As I Lay Frying — A Rehoboth Beach Memoir," "Fried & True — Tales of Rehoboth Beach" and "For Frying Out Loud — Rehoboth Beach Diaries."

The Old Woman and the Sea

Despite my inexperience, “we” caught some keepers

BY FAY JACOBS | ILLUSTRATION BY ROB WATERS

Now I’m a hunter-gatherer. I was in the Florida Keys with friends — me to spend three days in the pool and my mate to go deep-sea fishing with Captain Bob.

On the night before our first respective outings, my other half ordered the catch of the day at a local restaurant. Apparently, it was the catch of the previous Tuesday, as food poisoning ensued.

With no way the first mate could leave the

condo the next morning, I offered up my non-fisherperson services instead. I couldn’t promise that my being Captain Bob’s crew would be better than his fishing alone, and frankly, it might prove way worse, but I was oddly game and so was the captain.

We saw a glorious sunrise, applied a thick coat of SPF 50 epoxy, and tore through the calm ocean at warp speed until we were, gulp, 39 miles offshore, no land in sight. I expected the inverted hull of the *Poseidon* or at least Leo DiCaprio to float by.

Alfred Hitchcock’s birds circled overhead, but I learned they signaled fish below. Captain Bob lowered the baited hooks and we trolled. Within minutes, my fishing rod began bouncing and I answered the call to “reel it in!” Sadly, I turned the reel handle backwards and it fell off. I avoided Bob’s gape-jawed gaze, scrambling to screw the handle back on so I could claim my still-hooked catch.

Back in business, I reeled the bright blue-and-yellow mahi-mahi toward the boat. When it was swimming alongside, Bob grabbed the pole and told me to get the net into the water to scoop up the fish. I leaned over the side of the boat, stretching mightily, the net barely touching the waves. “Put it down in the water!” the captain urged. “I’m trying!” I hollered, poised for a Greg Louganis into the sea.

By the time Bob, who is 6 foot 4, with a 747 wingspan, realized I was height-challenged, he

was holding the flapping fish up shoulder high and just air-lifted it into the boat.

A fish gobbled the bait on his side of the vessel and Bob, going solo, reeled in and netted a second and then a third mahi, making it abundantly clear this was fated to be a one-man operation with a studio audience. I did my best to stay out of his way. We snagged plenty of too-small fish, tossing them back, but at regular intervals the royal “we” caught the big ones.

“**Captain Bob lowered the baited hooks and we trolled. Within minutes, my fishing rod began bouncing and I answered the call to ‘reel it in!’**”

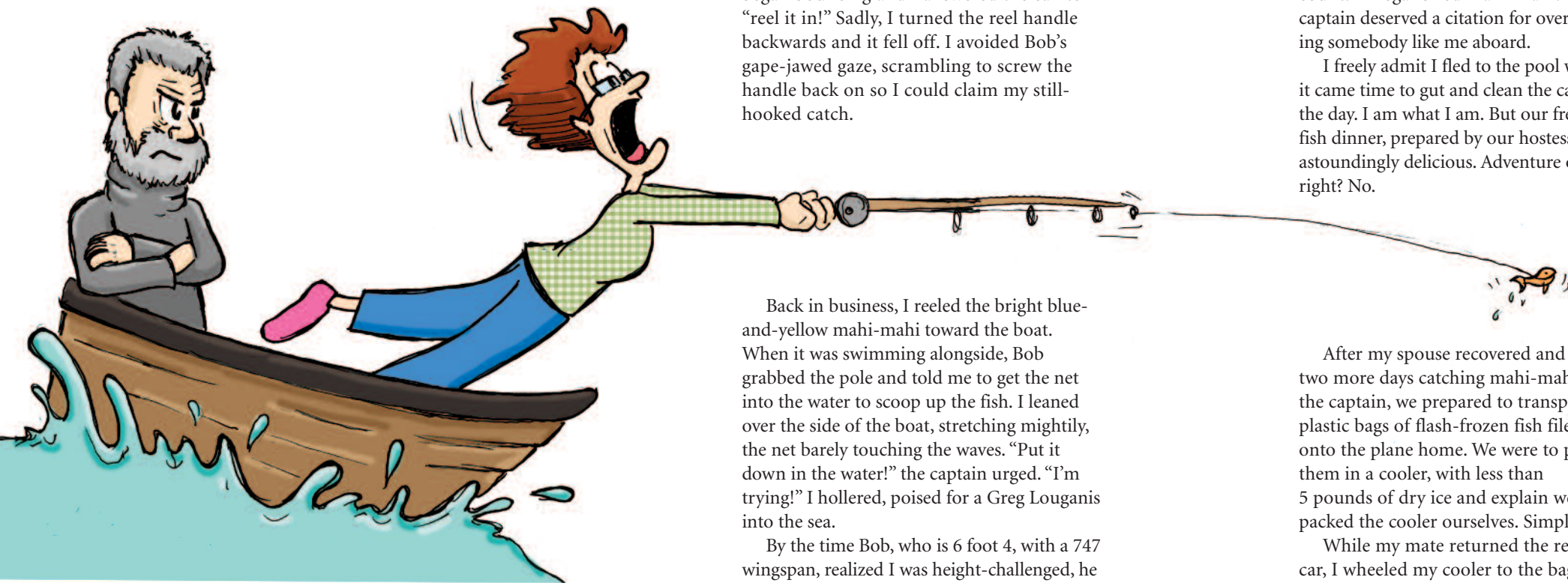
Working to remove the hooks, the captain drew lots of fish blood, turning the boat into a MASH unit. It took everything I had not to scream like a girl. We hosed down the ER and, given the hot sun, doused ourselves as well. It was my first-ever wet T-shirt event.

Overall, we spent seven hours finding seagull-approved fishing spots. I only snagged the boat’s prop twice. Final count: 11 legal-sized mahi-mahi. The captain deserved a citation for overcoming somebody like me aboard.

I freely admit I fled to the pool when it came time to gut and clean the catch of the day. I am what I am. But our fresh fish dinner, prepared by our hostess, was astoundingly delicious. Adventure over, right? No.

After my spouse recovered and spent two more days catching mahi-mahi with the captain, we prepared to transport 35 plastic bags of flash-frozen fish filets onto the plane home. We were to pack them in a cooler, with less than 5 pounds of dry ice and explain we packed the cooler ourselves. Simple.

While my mate returned the rental car, I wheeled my cooler to the baggage



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scale. "What's in there?" asked the airline official.

"Mahi-mahi with less than 5 pounds of dry ice. I packed it myself," I answered, obediently.

"Show me," he said, "because lady, you know you are asking us to transport dangerous gas." (Dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide.)

I untangled the cooler strap, lifted the lid, and expected the clerk to nod and send the seafood onto the conveyor belt.

"Take the dry ice out and weigh it," he ordered.

You're kidding? Now the man was giving *me* dangerous gas. I considered, then rejected, offering him a fish stick bribe. Then I gingerly extracted the dry ice sack, hoping it wouldn't leak and cremate me, as I carried it, like a live hand grenade, to the next scale — 4.4 pounds. Whew. I cautiously retraced my steps with the potential terrorist weapon and plopped it back in the cooler.

"That strap won't keep the cooler safely closed," the clerk said, tossing me a heavy roll of clear tape. "Tape it shut."

Then he watched, with great amusement, as I dropped to my knees, balanced the cooler on one shoulder, stretching the tape over, around and under the cooler multiple times, practically prostrate on the floor, flailing and grunting.

With the cooler wrapped like a mummy, I had no tool to cut the tape roll off. The stony-faced airport worker offered nothing, and we all know you can't travel with so much as a nail file anymore. Desperate, this crouching tiger in the downward doggie position chewed the tape free. I'm sure the story made that night's TSA happy hour.

But I'm happy to report that the filets made it home to the freezer just fine. We've had a fish fry. My sunburn is healing. I'm secretly pleased with my deep sea adventure. But when we run out of our personal catch, Rehoboth Beach Seafood Market will suffice. ■

FAY JACOBS is the author of the books "As I Lay Frying — A Rehoboth Beach Memoir," "Fried & True — Tales of Rehoboth Beach" and "For Frying Out Loud — Rehoboth Beach Diaries."

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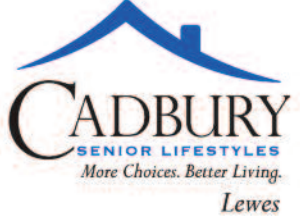
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Easy Rider

I think I'm stable — just not on two wheels

BY FAY JACOBS | ILLUSTRATION BY ROB WATERS

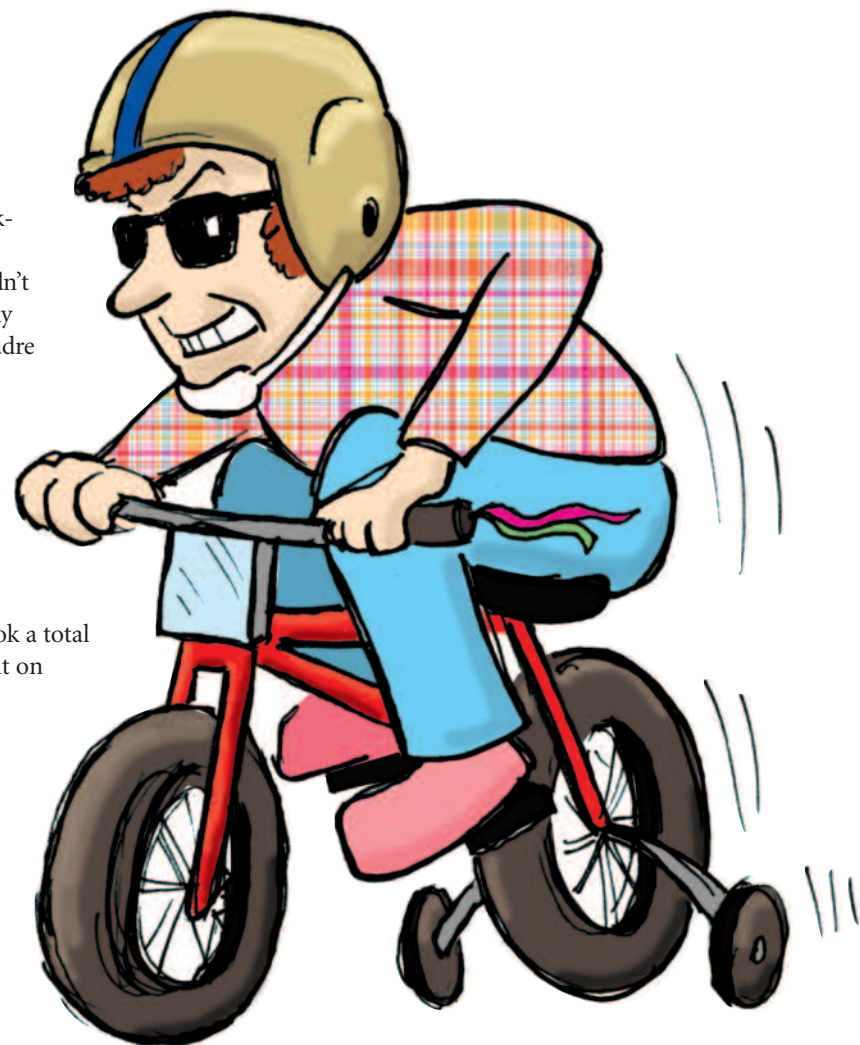
My new bike was delivered yesterday. I have a very speckled history when it comes to biking. I didn't learn to ride a bike until I was 32. I still see my adult self, wobbling down the street with a cadre of other adults running behind me yelling, "You can do it, you can do it!" It was right out of the film "Kramer vs. Kramer," only in that case Dustin Hoffman cheered a 6-year-old.

Quite pathetically, I had forced myself to learn to ride a bicycle to impress a new love in my life. My novice biking status unshared, my amour and I took a total of two 'round-the-block rides and one jaunt on the very flat Eastern Shore before I made a tactical error.

Still in the glow of this new relationship, I agreed to take a vacation where we'd abandon the car on Cape Cod and take our bikes and backpacks on a ferry to Nantucket.

I did this, despite never once feeling stable on two wheels, and in fact, certain I had an inner ear disorder preventing me from staying upright. That this math moron could balance a checkbook better than my butt on a bike scared me. Further frightening was that not once while previously pedaling did I ever look at any scenery, staring instead, the entire time, at my front tire and praying I would not wipe out.

So this liar, liar, handlebars-on-fire went on the bike adventure



anyway. I have to say, I felt uncharacteristically sporty and even a bit smug standing with my bike on the ferry, luggage hanging from my back. I loved thinking that the auto passengers saw me as somebody who would take this kind of excursion.

My self-righteousness was short-lived. We docked at a cobblestone ramp, followed by an even bumpier cobblestone street. It was, literally, a rocky start. And our hotel was four blocks straight up a steep hill. I attempted to ride, but after two grunting false starts and a close call at T-boning a parked car and taking out a family of four, I wound up walking my Schwinn up the entire ghastly hill.

We finally arrived at the Lucretia Mott House Hotel, named for an American women's rights activist and social reformer. Noticing my considerable distress at schlepping the Schwinn — perhaps it was the wheezing — my companion said, "Let's lock the bikes up and go get a drink."

Clearly disgusted, I replied, "Let's *not* lock the bikes up and hope mine gets stolen."

Things were not going well. But at least the Mott House had a handy cocktail lounge. Lucretia may have had many social causes, but I'm guessing that the temperance movement wasn't among them. So the bikes were locked and we got loaded.

The next morning, we bounced our bikes down the cobblestone grade and set out on a nice, flat, paved road to the ocean. With a stiff wind at our backs, we got quite a push in the pedaling department, making it an easy and unexpectedly comfortable ride. I even looked up from my front tire occasionally to admire the historic homes, rooftop widow's walks and spectacular landscaping. We'd ridden 3 miles in 15 minutes without incident. I'm not saying I was doing wheelies, but I at least remained vertical.

At water's edge, the wind continued to whip as we took obligatory photos and enjoyed the sights and sounds of surf and seagulls.

But then it was time to go back to town. The wind, which provided such a lovely lift on the way down was now squarely in our faces, holding us back, making each straining turn of the pedals a year of hard labor. With aching legs and burning lungs, we saw happy bikers coming at us, giggling and zipping toward the beach. "Laugh now, you idiots!" I hollered, "because you're never getting back!!!"

As I pedaled, panted and wobbled, turkey buzzards circled overhead, tagging me for future roadkill. At one point I squeezed my brakes, hopped off the bike, emitted a string of expletives, and threw the vehicle down. But the sorry sight of my companion trying to wrangle a bike in each hand got me back in the saddle.

It was an hour-long struggle to get back. I'd taken one ugly spill, skinned both knees, and twisted my ankle on my dismount in Lucretia Mott's parking lot. An ice bag and several Band-Aids later, we went to dinner, having negotiated a pact to spend the rest of the vacation on foot.

I am happy to report that despite my false advertising as somebody ready for the Tour de France and my less than sterling behavior in Nantucket, the relationship flourished. We've been

“As I pedaled, panted and wobbled, turkey buzzards circled overhead, tagging me for future roadkill.”

together 33 years and four months since that unfortunate cycling expedition.

I never rode that bike again, and in

fact, it was last seen rusted to the garage wall, conveying to the home's new owners when we moved to Rehoboth 16 years ago.

So why in heck did I just get a brand new Schwinn? And why did my spouse happily return from Kmart with handlebar streamers, a horn and a deck of cards to put in the wheel spokes?

Because my new Schwinn has three wheels. I've named her Lucretia. ■

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