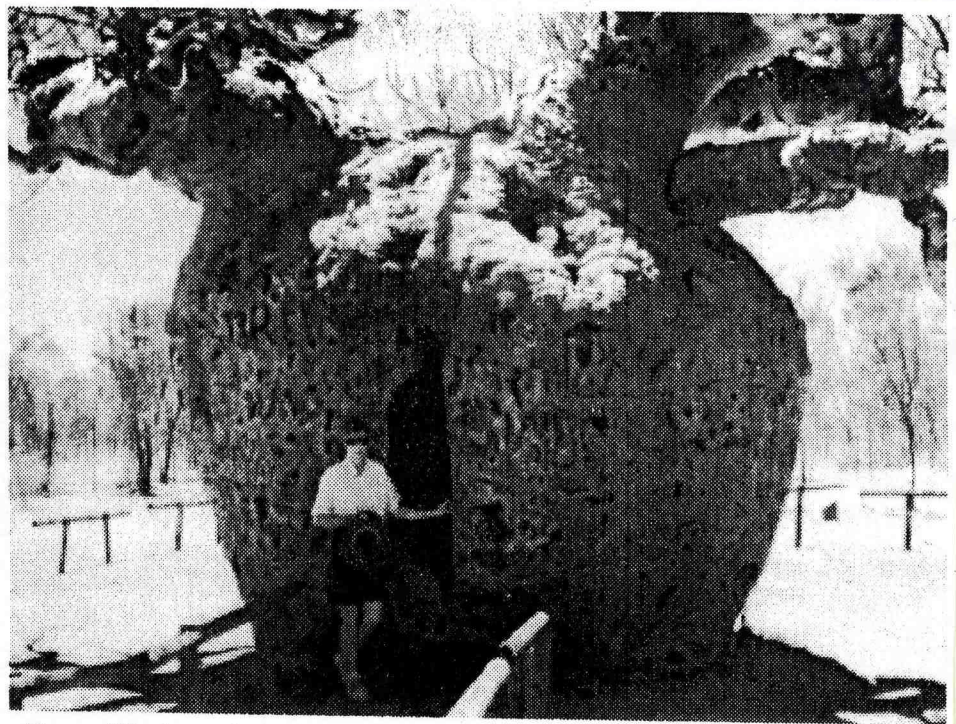




Herm stopped to take this picture of a burning wheat field near Geraldton. The fire jumped the road ahead of him and there was fire both in front and behind. After Herm drove through, everyone told him how lucky he was not to be caught.



Gerree Hind stands in front of the "Prison Tree" which is located near Derby. The police used this tree as a goal and it could hold 14 prisoners. It is a Baobab or "upsidedown" tree, the trees have earned this name because the branches look like roots. These trees have hollow trunks and can store gallons of sweet water in the summer.

There were several interesting facts about Australia that Gerree mentioned. "All their animals and plants are so different from ours. They don't have squirrels or raccoons, I thought everybody had squirrels. A lot of the animals that have been introduced are very very bad, for example cats. They call them Feral Cats, cats that are let go and become wild and then eat all the little birds small rodents, and little Kangaroo type things, animals that are pretty endangered." Gerree also spoke of Feral Camels, camels that were brought in to travel across the desert which have become wild and number from 30,000 to 45,000. They are good quality animals and they are sold back to the Arabs for a good price. They enjoyed a camel ride and Gerree has changed her mind about camels " I always thought they spitted and bit and were really rotten, but they were really quite nice. I guess if you're rotten to them you teach them to be bad."

Some of the other animals that have gone wild include Feral Donkeys, Feral Pigs, Water Buffalos and Wild Horses called Brumbies.

Before these animals were introduced, there were no hoofed animals in Australia. As soon as these hoofed animals were introduced they destroyed the vegetation and the fragile inland. Because it is so dry they caused a lot of erosion. They also destroyed plants and affected the water quality. The Feral (or wild) Pigs rooted out the rainforests, disturbing its ecosystem to dangerous levels.

The ranches in Australia are huge, some averaging around 10,000 acres in size. One beast would need an acre or more just to exist.

They were warned about not camping in dry river beds because even if it wasn't raining where you were, a rain upstream could come rushing down and you could drown.

They ate a lot of lamb, fish, and meat pies with tomato sauce. They also enjoyed Pavlova, which is a meringue shell filled with whipped cream and fruit.

Living the lake-locked sailors' dream



At left: Mary and Marvin Nethercott are glad to be home after spending nine months cruising to the Bahamas and back aboard their yacht, Thursday's Child IV. (CLIFFORD BARON/OUR COMMUNITY PRESS) At right: Marvin built the 43' steel boat from the Robertson plans, a project that took him 10 years to complete. (PHOTO/CONTRIBUTED)

Merwin Nethercott is the son of the late Percy and Mary Nethercott of Wardsville. His wife Mary is the daughter of the late Jack and Annie Gilchrist of Dunwich Township.

April is known around Port Stanley as boat fever season.

And if sailors down at the Port Stanley Sailing Squadron aren't working on their boats, dreaming about them or haunting ships' chandlery shops, they just might be talking to Marvin and Mary Nethercott.

The Nethercott's are recent recipients of the Squadron cruising club award for their nine month sojourn to the Bahamas on board their 43' yacht, Thursday's Child IV.

Not only did the Nethercotts do what most lake-locked sailors dream of, Marvin built the formidable steel yacht himself, from lofting the lines to finishing the elegant ash interior.

"It took about 10 years to build," said Nethercott, who had no previous boat building experience and is an electrical contractor by trade. "You have to really enjoy the building, and I guess I wanted to see if it was ocean capable."

"It was his dream," says Mary simply.

The Nethercotts previously owned a wooden 19' Lightning dinghy, a boat that makes Mary just roll her eyes, and sailed a Hughes 29 while Thursday's Child was under construction.

"I'm not a sailor," laughs Mary. "In fact, if you ask around the club, I'm probably the least likely person there to do this kind of trip."

The Nethercott's remember their Sept. '95 departure as hasty.

"We threw everything on board, and off we went," said Mary. "And I must say, I really enjoyed the trip. Your lifestyle doesn't really change, and it's really not that difficult to adjust to life in 43'."

What was different?

"Conserving water was a biggest thing," said Mary. "You have to carry all your water and it took some getting used to not showering every day."

"The lack of communication is another," adds Marvin. "There are no telephones and the VHF radio is very local. If I were I doing it again, I'd take a ham radio."

Mary said cooking on board with their three burner alcohol stove/oven wasn't a problem.

"I'm a much better shopper now," she smiles.

Tending an ocean going boat is full-time job say the Nethercotts, who didn't have any trouble filling their days. The Robertson 43 is a large boat for a couple to manage, but the Nethercotts were pleased by of their boat's performance.

"It has acres of sail," says Marvin. It's a lot to handle, but with a roller furling system, it wasn't bad.

Thursday's Child IV travelled to the Bahamas via the Intercostal Waterway, or ICW. The Nethercotts said the weather was generally not good during the early part of the trip, and included heavy fog.

"We carry a portable GPS unit (Global Positioning Server) on board for navigation, in addition to dead reckoning," said Marvin. "It was deadly accurate. Coming into Cape May in fog, it was so accurate in fact, we almost hit the entrance buoy."

In easy stages, the Nethercotts arrived in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., spending Christmas before making the passage across to the Bahamas. "At St. Augustine, we went hard aground, and had to be towed off. It's just one of those things that happen. There are tow boats down there who just wait for you to go aground. A little local knowledge helps!" says

Marvin.

Navigating around the Allen Key, they gathered memories of dolphins, iguanas, scary coral heads that have wrecked many an unwary sailor, and 70' deep waters so clear you could still see the bottom. They found a sheltered anchorage at Norman's Key, lingering for 17 days fishing and enjoying the antics of colorful leopard rays.

At Aluthera on the northern tip of the Bahamas, a

boat broke loose and hit Thursday's Child in the middle of the night in a 72 knot wind (hurricane force), disabling their rudder and driving both boats up on a beach.

"They pulled us off and into the town dock," said Marvin.

"And it's a good thing Marv has such a complete workshop on board," said Mary.

On the return trip, the Nethercotts were waylaid at

the Erie Barge Canals by extensive flooding that closed the five locks, delaying their arrival back in Port Stanley by several weeks. They got back June 9, 1996.

"It was an accomplishment," says Marvin. "We enjoyed it and I'd recommend it to anyone who thinks they might like to try it.

"We met so many nice people too," adds Mary. "I missed my family, and really, I'm not a good sailor. But I

enjoyed it. It was a great learning experience and change in our lives. But I don't think I'd want to cross the ocean or anything. I know my limits."

How did the nine months of life affect their relationship?

"You have to have a sense of humor," says Mary. "Like when we were picking our way through the coral, I told Marvin I'd taken care of my babies, and now he could watch his!"