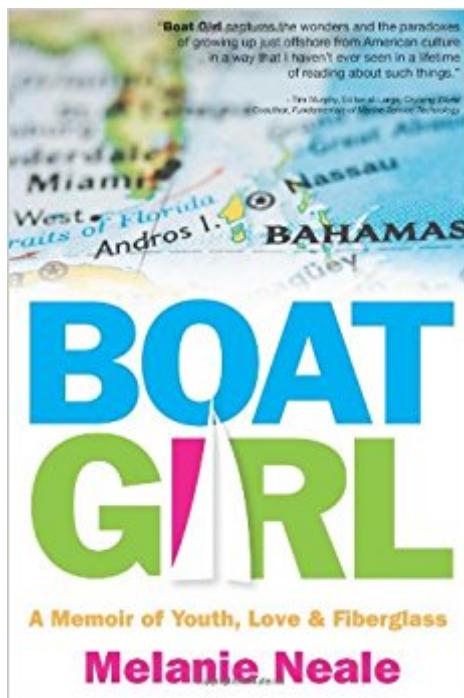


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Boat Girl: A Memoir Of Youth, Love, And Fiberglass



Synopsis

"Boat Girl" is the heartbreakingly moving memoir of growing up aboard a sailboat. Throughout the 1980's and 90's, Melanie's family lived aboard a 47-foot sailboat, spending their summers along the US East Coast and their winters in the Bahamas. But the cruising life was not all fun in the sun. The family had to work hard to pay for their way of life. They dodged hurricanes, overzealous federal agents and bullying land-kids. And they endured a boatload of family drama. As her father published articles about how living on a boat brings families together, Melanie secretly struggled with an eating disorder, the alienation of being a boat kid, and confusion over her developing sexuality. As an adult, she lived aboard her own 28-foot sailboat and had several relationships trying to find someone who wasn't intimidated by her stubborn independence and free-spirited lifestyle. "Boat Girl" weaves all this together into a story about a girl who, once all is said and done, simply wants her own boat and her own life. Melanie paints a vivid picture of the trials and tribulations of family life aboard a sailboat without drowning the reader in the technical details of sailing. "Boat Girl" strikes a perfect balance between a coming of age story and a sea tale, enjoyable for boaters and land-lovers alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you are at all curious to find out what (growing up aboard a boat) is like, I urge you to read Melanie's memoir, Boat Girl, which has just been released by Beating Windward Press. She is every bit as good a writer as her dad and doesn't pull any punches. It's all in here: early memories of the drug-plagued Bahamas in the 1980s, anorexia and teen angst, the fights with her

domineering, somewhat paranoid father, the sex and drinking, the struggle for identity, and--finally--the triumph of independence.- Charles J. Doane, *Sail Magazine*As a child raised aboard--and as a father who raised a child aboard--I am deeply interested in boat kids. Melanie is among our best. She is not only wonderfully wacky, she tells the truth in large and small ways. I admire her--as a writer and human being. This is a delightful book... that only a boat kid could write! Cap'n Fatty Goodlander, Author and Columnist, *Cruising World*An inspiring and beautifully written true story of a young woman schooled in the sea.- Dan Wakefield, author of the memoir *New York in the Fifties*Melanie's *Boat Girl* captures the wonders and the paradoxes of growing up just offshore from American culture in a way that I haven't ever seen in a lifetime of reading about such things. So now you're one of the lucky ones. For if you too are a boat-mad kid, the story of this *Boat Girl* might just point you toward home.- Tim Murphy, Editor-at-Large, *Cruising World*, Coauthor, *Fundamentals of Marine Service Technology* (ABYC, 2012)The Florida Book Review writes: "My anchor as a reader in this vivid, swift-moving account of life on the sea is Neale's mind at work, the consciousness through which all her experiences are filtered. As she regards her father during their early travels, Neale observes, 'He fantasized, sitting on these muddy islands, about tropical islands that he could explore and conquer. Unlike him, I just wanted to explore and learn. There was no inner colonist in me.' There was a memoirist instead."- Julie Marie Wade, Author of *Wishbone: A Memoir in Fractures*

For a slide show of images that didn't make it into the book, visit: melanieneale.com

I'm one of the lucky ones. Long before the publication of this book, long before the Short Story column that appeared in *Cruising World* magazine, long before the indelible Hurricane Wilma feature in *Soundings*, even before the college seminars and the distinguished MFA, I was lucky to know the boat-mad kid who would become the writer Melanie Neale. I am myself a boat-mad kid (a condition unbounded by age), and I say lucky because, even in a world as fluid as liveaboard sailing, kindred spirits don't find each other as often as you'd guess. Yet from the moment Melanie and I first met on an anchored boat in Narragansett Bay, we each recognized in the other one who steered by familiar stars. Melanie's *Boat Girl* captures the wonders and the paradoxes of growing up just offshore from American culture in a way that I haven't ever seen in lifetime of reading about such things. So now you're one of the lucky ones. For if you too are a boat-mad kid, the story of this *Boat Girl* might just point you toward home.Tim MurphyEditor-at-Large, *Cruising World*Coauthor, *Fundamentals of Marine Service Technology* (ABYC, 2012)

Melanie Neale opens *Boat Girl* at an improbable age, to be exact...prebirth. In this impossible remark she comments on smelling fiberglass resin. It is however, a resonant statement...fiberglass is in her blood, it is in her heart. Fiberglass being the modern miracle that opened sailing and the free spirit life to all, not just the privileged. The boat she refers to is the one she will spend her first 19 years attached to, both ship and author coming into the world at the same time. Throughout the memoir you can tell her heart is never far from that vessel even as she yearns to free herself from it from time to time. It is those moments that make up her life. A little girl cruising with her idealistic parents and younger sister, contemplating all the things kids contemplate, the only difference is she did so from the V-birth of a 45 foot sailboat, and not a frilly, girly bedroom in the 'burbs. It is from this perspective she writes of the things of youth, the carefree years, the coming of age and the angst of sexuality born of closeness. The relationships formed and forged in trust and then truncated by sailing schedules or the necessities of the reality of modern living. Throughout the story there is a sense of loss and reunion, relationships that continue despite distance, and especially the ones that end unrequited. It is a wonderful reflection on a unique life lived with boundaries so far removed from the norm it can be difficult to visualize, but Neale's writing takes you there, reluctantly sometimes but always with a sense of eagerness. Through it all, in the end, it is a story of love, a love of people and places and especially that most unique love of all, the one for the smell of fiberglass and open water. It is a tale that is both endearing and familiar and sometimes haunting. A definite read for any cruiser and especially any cruiser with kids.

The entire time I was reading *Boat Girl*, I kept thinking about a quote from Louisa May Alcott from *Transcendental Wild Oats* and the danger of trying to live for one's principals, and how unforgiving the world can be in relation to the "other." *Boat Girl* is very much about the other; it's a different way of living, so foreign to most of the cubicle-clad world: a family's attempt to leave behind convention and the scrutiny that that bold decision can invite. But Melanie's story, which takes place in exotic island settings and quaint ports up and down the coast, is about so much more. At its heart it's the story of a girl finding herself, finding her own voice, becoming her own person. The insecurities, the hopes, the broken hearts. Which takes a story about life on the rollicking waves of the high sea and very much grounds it in the cold, hard earth of growing up. And the best part is that Melanie's whole story isn't written yet. I look forward to the next chapter! HIGHLY recommend!

In 1980, I was just a project, but my mom and dad had big plans for me. I started sailing when I was

3 months old and I learned to swim and climb before I could actually walk! I spent my childhood sailing from eastern Canada down the east coast of the states all the way to the Bahamas every year aboard L'Istorlet, as CS 27 and then Kamsin, a CS 36. I can't remember exactly when I met Melanie and Carolyn, but it must have been somewhere in the early 90's. Reading Boat Girl was like going back in time as it brought back so many childhood memories, reading about all those places so familiar to me! This is the first book I read since the birth of my second child, and once I opened it, I couldn't stop reading until I was done! There are so many things you don't know about your friends and I find that writing the way Melanie wrote her story is like offering yourself in your most vulnerable position. This book is both a great story but a shocking truth that I never suspected! I enjoyed reading it and it made me realize how life can be tough but amazing altogether. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone! I even bought an extra copy for my parents! Happy reading!

Boat Girl will take you on a journey not only through stories of traveling to beautiful places and encounters with unique and diverse people, but right down into the sinew and bone of your own humanness--the angst, the joy, the pain, and longings we've all felt on the sometimes-winding path to finding ourselves. It's a story not just of the adventures had sailing along the Eastern Coast and through the Bahamas throughout a most unique childhood, but is also one about a woman coming to know herself piece by piece. One has to wonder if moving from place to place so often leaves one ever feeling truly anchored, but Ms. Neale tells her stories beautifully and vividly--with equal parts guts and poignancy--and the reader is never left guessing the measure of strength and determination she has. A most worthwhile read!

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