

PROFILE



By Marilyn Michael
Photos courtesy Elsie Hulsizer

Elsie Hulsizer Sharing the Adventure

When asked what inspired her to earn a Masters degree in oceanography, Elsie Hulsizer tells of growing up on Puget Sound's Three Tree Point, and of the many hours she enjoyed aboard a small boat her dad had built, dragging a plankton net. She was fascinated by the saltwater ecosystem before that was a word common to the lexicon. Lucky for Northwest boaters, her fascination grew beyond the interaction of small biological organisms to the cultural, geological and historical factors that shape an area. Retired now, Elsie is a writer and a cruising boater. Her newly published book, *Glaciers, Bears and Totems — Sailing in Search of the Real Southeast Alaska*, and her 2006 book, *Voyages to Windward — Sailing Adventures on Vancouver Island's West Coast*, take readers on voyages, not just in a travel writing sense, but on voyages of discovery.

DRAWN TO THE WATER

Elsie progressed from her childhood plankton nets to graduate research on Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, where she studied the occurrence of zooplankton and their impact on the marine ecosystem. She met and married her husband Steve, a marine engineer, during



Elsie Hulsizer aboard *Osprey*. She believes that "Our experiences of getting to a place ... are unique and as important as the destination." (Ineke deLange photo)

college. After graduating, they settled in Rhode Island and bought a 21-foot sailboat to enjoy on Narragansett Bay. Summers they would tow the boat to a family summer home on Penobscot Bay, Maine and sail it there, as Elsie describes, "amidst lobster floats in the bay's traditionally consistent sailing winds."

"Selling that boat after three years," continues Elsie, "we bought a Chesapeake 32-foot sloop, which we literally rebuilt over two years. It had some rotten bulkheads the surveyor hadn't found,

and a delaminated deck. The good thing was we knew that boat inside and out as we took off on the voyage that would bring us to Seattle. From Philadelphia we sailed up to Boston to visit family and friends. From there it was south through the Intracoastal Waterway to Charleston and then out to the Caribbean. Going down the east coast we were a month late and fall came early. There was a gale every three days; our working sails were two reefs and a storm jib."

"We sailed to Venezuela visiting



Elsie Hulsizer and her husband Steve in Reid Inlet.
(Gene Albert photo)



Osprey, the Hulsizer's 44-foot Annapolis sloop, at Dawes Glacier.



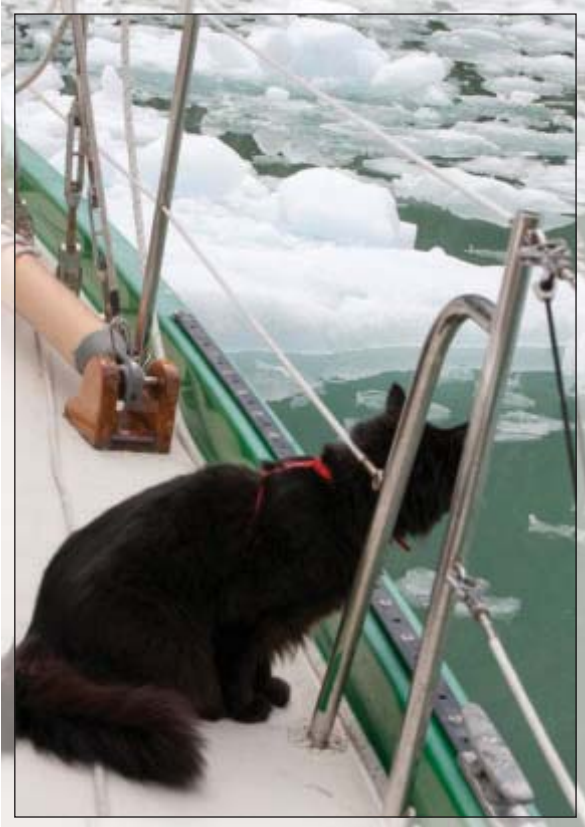
A brown bear at Fords Terror. As Elsie Hulsizer explains, you see things aboard a boat that you don't see from a cruise ship or a car.



An octopus carving on display in Wrangell, Alaska.



An eagle devours a salmon, forming an iconic Alaskan tableau. Elsie Hulsizer uses photography to share her adventurer's love of Northwest cruising.



Boat cat “Jigger” investigates ice floating past Osprey’s hull.

friends Steve had made working for the Navy. A spinnaker pole broke along the way, but with all our rebuilding experience it wasn’t a problem. We just got out the epoxy and clamps and were on our way the next day. We went through the Panama Canal, then up the coast as far as Acapulco. From there we sailed out to Hawaii and back to Seattle. We had left the east coast in September of 1977 and arrived in Seattle in September of 1978.”

ADVENTURES ON VANCOUVER ISLAND’S WEST COAST

After their year-long cruise, the San Juans and Gulf Islands seemed tame to them. So on their next vacation they headed to the west coast of Vancouver Island. They sailed the windward route on all but one of 18 trips there over 25 years. Out of those trips Elise wrote her first book, *Voyages to Windward*, published in 2006.

“Vancouver Island’s west coast offers more exciting sailing; you have five different inlets and sounds on the west coast,” Elsie explains. “You can spend a whole summer and still not go every place that it has to offer. People are afraid of it as it’s on the ocean, but what they don’t know is that once you get there and get in one of the sounds, you can spend days there. In our shorter, two to three week trips we could get to the Bunsby Islands, halfway up — almost to Brooks Peninsula. The ocean stretches are half-a-day to a day. Today there are a few more cruisers there, but not that many. We can still have most anchorages to ourselves. For years I’ve been trying to encourage boaters to take the route out the Straits of San Juan de Fuca.”

ON-THE-WATER PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

In addition to her writing, Elsie Hulsizer is also an accomplished photographer. Her photography appears in her books, it’s been published in magazines, she uses it to illustrate talks she gives on her travels, and she has had photo exhibitions. Her discerning eye for composition is no fluke — Elsie attended classes at Photographic Center Northwest and graduated in 2001 with a Certificate of Fine Arts in photography.

Elsie made the transition from film to digital and chooses to shoot with a Canon digital Rebel XTi SLR (single lens reflex) camera. Her strong recommendation for shooting pictures on the water is to use an SLR rather than a point-and-shoot camera. She chose Canon because it was the first to offer an image stabilizing lens — a must, she feels, for taking good photographs on

the water. She says that an important advantage of shooting pictures with an SLR camera is that you can shoot in a format called Camera RAW. It’s a format that allows you to make more changes after the picture has been shot than are possible in a JPG format.

Today, Elsie recommends using digital not only because you can take so many pictures and delete easily, but also because digital format allows you to use one of the many excellent photo editing software programs. She started out using the program Canon offered with her SLR camera. She feels the programs offered with the point-and-shoot cameras aren’t as good. A year ago, she started using a program from Adobe called Adobe Photoshop Lightroom and wished she’d

switched to it earlier. According to Elsie, there are other good programs and they don’t have to be expensive. She suggests that, for under \$100, a program called Adobe Photoshop Elements is good.



Elsie Hulsizer uses a Canon digital SLR camera with an image stabilizing lens — a must, she feels, for taking good photographs on the water, like this image she captured of a humpback whale.

FORDS TERROR: BRAVING THE NARROWS

(Excerpted from *Glaciers, Bears and Totems: Sailing in Search of the Real Southeast Alaska* by Elsie Hulsizer, Harbour Publishing, 2010)

I surprised myself during our third summer in Alaska when I suggested we go to Fords Terror. A destination that had terrified me the year before suddenly seemed intriguing. Two summers of navigating among glaciers and sailing through narrow rock-bound passages had given me more courage.

Fords Terror, a narrow six-mile-long fjord off Endicott Arm, is famous both for its spectacular scenery and the story behind its discovery. In 1889 Harry L. Ford, a crew member on the US Coast and Geodetic Survey vessel *Carlisle P. Patterson*, entered the fjord in a rowboat at slack water. There he was trapped by raging currents and float-

ing ice until the next slack tide released him.

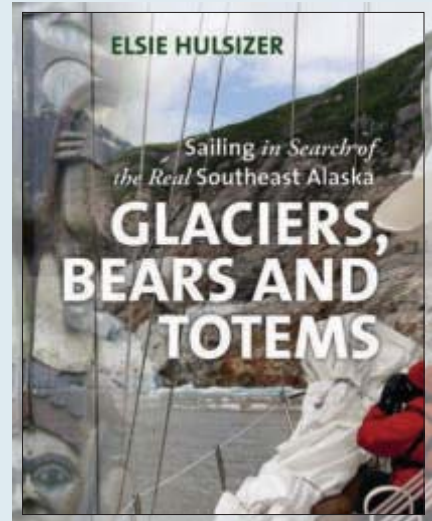
Although the tidewater glacier that clogged the fjord with ice during Ford's time has retreated into the mountains, other reasons to fear Fords Terror remain. Deep-keeled sailboats must enter at slack water, but the time of high-water slack is known only vaguely and varies with the height of the tide. Uncharted rocks and reefs are reported near the entrance, and the channel takes a hard turn just after that, obstructing visibility. And, finally, icebergs from Dawes Glacier work their way into the fjord and rush out the exit with the ebb tide.

I knew all this but decided we should visit Fords Terror anyway. How could we fully explore Southeast Alaska without visiting this famous fjord? After all, Southeast Alaska was about adventure and spectacular scenery.

Fords Terror offers both.

We made our entry into Fords Terror even more risky by arriving late.

— Excerpt courtesy Harbour Publishing



DISCOVERING SOUTHEAST ALASKA

Elsie spent her career primarily managing a number of environmental programs in government agencies. She managed an entire rewriting of the Seattle Shoreline Master Program that details how property is managed within 200 feet of the shoreline. At the Puget Sound Water Authority she worked on the Puget Sound Water Quality Plan.

"My husband and I retired in 2006 and took our first trip to Southeast Alaska, leaving in May and returning in September," says Elsie. "Having already written *Voyages to Windward*, on our three trips to Alaska I went with the idea of doing another book. We found it exciting and much bigger than I expected, the distances are so great and the mountains are so tall, it's easy to get tricked by the scale on the charts. Something may look like a cove but when you get there it's a huge bay. Glacier Bay should be renamed Glacier Sound. We went back to Southeast Alaska in 2007 and 2008. My current book, *Glaciers, Bears and Totems*, came

out of those three trips."

WRITING ABOUT THE JOURNEYS

"My books are sort of like having a geologist, historian, anthropologist and biologist onboard," explains Elsie. "Most people don't have the time to do all the reading that I do about places; I'm distilling it for them. I guess I'd describe myself as a travel writer and storyteller on a boat. My main difference from land-based travel writers is the perspective of looking at things from the water toward the land. A major difference in travel

writing from a boat is that there is more on the experience of travel. Our experiences of getting to a place amidst fog, storms, calms and currents are unique and as important as the destination."

"We are seeing places others cannot see, places we couldn't go on a cruise ship or driving. There have been other travel writers whose mode of travel is a boat, but I'm unique in my region. I suppose William Least Heat Moon, especially his book, *River Horse: A Voyage Across America*, and Jonathan Raban, have been inspirations for my writing. *The Curve of Time* is a well-written book about the Northwest written by someone traveling

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Sailing to windward in rough weather aboard *Osprey*. The Hulsizers sailed the windward route on all but one of their 18 trips to the west coast of Vancouver Island.

on a boat. Also, *Seven-Knot Summers*, by Beth Hill.”

“In college one of my favorite classes was Northwest Anthropology,” remembers Elsie. “Oceanography, history, anthropology — I read in all those disciplines. I want people to feel like they are coming along with us. My emphasis is on

many notes and pictures as I can, read about it during the winter and then go back to that same place, take better pictures and describe it better. In *Voyages to Windward*, we saw significant changes over the years. I was able to tell stories of the changes we observed, like watch-

the story, not just on description. My books are narratives, not logs or cruising guides. I tell stories about the places we saw and people we met. Reading my books gives you the experience of encountering the places and their history. My process for writing the books was to go someplace, experience it, take as

ing a total collapse of the salmon fishing industry. I bring scientific knowledge. In *Glaciers, Bears and Totems* I describe how glaciers work and how they advance. Glacial movement may be slow, but glaciers are so powerful they can destroy anything in their paths. When people understand about the history of a place or its geology before going there they get so much more enjoyment — what they see has more meaning.”

“My husband likes to say he ‘drives the boat,’” Elsie shares with a smile. “I’m an introvert, though, and without his wonderful sense of

adventure and his ability to engage complete strangers in conversation enhancing our experiences, we wouldn’t have met a third of the people I’ve enjoyed and written about. He’s also been the one who wants to sail everywhere. We’ve sailed into places where others would have dropped the sails much earlier. It’s led to tensions sometimes, but also to adventures that appear in my books. He is an engineer so is skilled at keeping the boat running and putting in the systems that we need to get it going in the first place.”

Elsie and Steve continue to enjoy Northwest cruising. In 2009 they cruised to the Queen Charlotte Islands. In 2010 they cruised to the Central Coast of British Columbia between Bella Bella and Prince Rupert. On that trip they realized they’d traveled 200 miles seeing only two people on land. They take their boat *Osprey*, a 1978 Annapolis 44 sloop with a distinctive green hull, out on Puget Sound a couple times a month, often with the Puget Sound Cruising Club. Elsie continues to write. She gives talks to boating and other organizations about their journeys, illustrating them with superb photography.

Elise Hulsizer evolved from having a scientist’s curiosity about the marine environment and an adventurer’s love of Northwest cruising, to developing a passion for sharing her knowledge and experiences through writing and photography. She takes her readers along on unique journeys to amazing Northwest cruising destinations. ↓



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