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"Irene" in the Arctic Circle, the 30th U.S. vessel ever to make the Northwest Passage. Photo courtesy of Ginger and Peter Niemann

AROUND THE WORLD AND THEN SOME

Double circumnavigators still say Port Townsend is their favorite

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They gave a "sigh of relief" in unison to describe the feeling of returning to the Olympic Peninsula, prompting laughter.

Ginger and Peter Niemann — sailing-famous and the 2021 winners of the Blue Water Medal by the Cruising Club of America, the organization's highest honor — now have their home in town. It was lovely and warm in their kitchen where they sat by windows giving life to the gray cotton skies and salivating greenery. Peter drank coffee, Ginger a pot of tea, from Royal Wessex cups and saucers, grazing on molasses and ginger cookies. The afternoon passed easily as they spoke of sunnier places they'd seen in their 52-foot sailboat, "Irene."

"Travel with the kitchen sink" is Peter's name for their style of voyage. Their boat is their little universe. They went from port to port as they wove over the years and each other, giggling when Ginger would excitedly blurt out details to supplement Peter's retellings.

The couple had been living in Seattle moored on their first boat, "Marcy," which, in 2006, took them around the world. Irene joined the family in 2011 and work began to fit her for their next circumnavigation.

In 2017, they wintered in Port Townsend,

working with the Shipwright's Co-op to ready Irene for their departure in that spring.

They left Washington in May and headed north, taking on the challenges of traveling through extreme latitudes as they traversed the Arctic Ocean, where Irene became the 30th U.S. vessel to make the Northwest Passage (that total includes Coast Guard, ice-breakers, and cruises). That's fewer boats than the amount of people who summit Mount Everest each year.

Peter makes a point to distinguish the difference between Everest climbers and sailors, laughing about the "man-against-nature businessman types."

ANCHORS AWEIGH

Having taken advantage of the warmth and 24-hour light of summer as they made their way around Alaska, Canada, and Greenland — negotiating blows and ice nonetheless — they set their sights south to follow warmer weather, trailing the U.S. East Coast down beyond Miami, hoping for opportunity to do Irene's maintenance over the winter. They stopped to moor away the colder months in South Carolina before continuing their plunge. Swiftly, they looped around Miami and turned Northward again; their Northern Atlantic crossing was ahead.

The Niemanns braved more than two weeks of open ocean wooled in fog. Pints of Guinness in a dim Irish pub christened their

entry to Europe. Winter's approach had them quickly on the move to Scotland, where they would live in Ardrrossan. Winter again held maintenance projects and brief days but was complimented by lamp-lit nights with drinks, train rides to Glasgow and Helensborough, summiting Goatfell, and reuniting with fellow sailors of yesteryear.

Spring brought another season of exploration. The Niemanns romped along the coastline, often in their dinghy, to mill about moss-coated ruins, delight in weather-plush cows and little sheep, and greet dogs tucked by their feet in pubs. They roamed the slick ancient stones of castles and kept their eyes open for Puffins and evidence of Vikings. When asked after their favorite places from their travels, Ginger and Peter both considered Scotland a strong contender.

The Niemanns' European voyage had numbered days due to the Shengen Agreement (an area of 26 European countries that operates under one jurisdiction for travel, limiting visitor's time to 90 days throughout the region).

They absorbed and enjoyed despite their haste.

Denmark, which they were able to sail through via inland routes (likewise in Germany), brought them lessons that they found "refreshingly simple" and "thought

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Quilcene school bond falls to defeat

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Quilcene voters have rejected a \$12.3 million bond proposal for a new elementary school.

The final ballots for the February 2022 Special Election were counted Friday morning and the election was certified as official by the Jefferson County Canvassing Board shortly after 1 p.m. Feb. 18.

In the final vote tally, Quilcene's Proposition 1 received a 59.4 percent "yes" vote, with 40.6 percent voting against the measure.

The bond measure required a 60 percent supermajority for passage.

The Quilcene School Board will meet this week to talk about the bond failure.

The board has the option of sending the bond proposal back to voters, during a special election in April or in November.

"From my perspective, a majority of the Quilcene School District community has let us know that they support the bond and want us to continue to make critical facilities improvements to support student learning," Superintendent Frank Redmon said in an email to The Leader.

"We came very close to the high bar of the supermajority, and I believe that with a bit more work we can demonstrate to more taxpayers that we have a responsible, affordable plan that serves the needs of our students and our community," he added.

In the first vote count on Election Night, the measure was just two votes shy of passing. In the updated tally Feb. 9, Quilcene's Proposition 1 dropped to a 59.22 percent "yes" vote from 59.96 percent counted the night before.

During a vote update Feb. 14, Prop. 1 had 59.37 percent in favor.

Five additional votes for Quilcene's Prop. 1 were added to the final tally Friday.

The final and official vote tally was 474 votes in favor, 324 votes in opposition, and two undervotes.

The majority "no" vote in one precinct doomed the bond proposal for a new elementary school, according to a review by The Leader of precinct votes.

The February 2022 Special Election was certified as official Friday.

The final ballots for the February 2022 Special Election were counted Friday morning, Feb. 18, and Quilcene's Proposition 1 fell to defeat with a 59.4 percent "yes" vote, with 40.6 percent voting "no."

The bond measure required a 60 percent supermajority for passage.

The final numbers for the special election, which also included school levies in Brinnon and Port Townsend that voters passed handily, were approved Feb. 17 by the Jefferson County Canvassing Board.

According to the final tally, a total of 824 voters cast ballots on the Quilcene measure. With 1,704 voters eligible to cast ballots, turnout for the special election was 48.3 percent.

Prop. 1 earned solid support in one of three precincts for the measure.

In Quilcene Precinct, the vote for Prop. 1 was 66.8 percent in favor.

In Coyle Precinct, the yes vote was 59.9 percent.

In Crocker Precinct, the area that includes Lind and Eaglemount roads on the north end, to south of Lords Lake and Lake Leland, the ballot measure had 54.3 percent in opposition to Prop. 1, and 45.6 percent in favor.



The Niemanns exploring Scotland in their dinghy. Photo courtesy of Ginger and Peter Niemann

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DOUBLE

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other countries (including our own) might learn a thing or two from the Northern European way of doing things," as they divulged in their travel notes.

In the Netherlands, they snuggled Irene into crowded harbors full of good-natured neighbors, narrowly avoiding looming mishaps and walking brick-laid downtown streets.

They were humbled by complex navigations down the Strait of Dover en route to the Channel Islands, leaving them sleep-deprived and in need of recovery by the time they made it to the island of Alderney.

After much needed hibernation and refueling, they made for Saint Malo, France, a gothic city protected by walls of granite. There, the Niemanns struggled for clarity on immigration but rejoiced for dinner, wine, and dessert at night and coffee and croissants in the morning.

They raced pigeons in the Bay of Biscay, saw horses and lighthouses at Isla Salvora, hosted their daughter while they cruised down the Costa da Morte and embracing red wine and Spanish ruins.

They walked slowly and took shady rests in the dry Mediterranean heat, and aboard Irene, waited for the cool afternoon breeze to move them along the coast. They witnessed the impact of terrorism on tourism in the semi-deserted marina village on the coast of Africa, walking faded red-bricked paths betwixt abandoned souvenir shops and watching the kitsch cycle of the remaining tourists aboard an imitation pirate ship cruising the bay.

WHERE THE ANCIENTS STOOD

In Greece, they lived amidst history and hiked to long-lost cement chapels and castle remains when they weren't swimming in the warm water or passing time at cafes.

By October, 2019 they made it to Turkey. They would winter there and move along again. They settled into a marina in Finike with a thriving international social scene. They were looking forward to the numerous weekly events there by the docks, going for walks, sampling the food in the many restaurants, interacting with the "hospitable welcoming people." Ginger began a practice of going to a weekly open air market.

It's unsettling to see photos from this time in their journey. There's a feeling of hauntedness or unreality. A photo of Ginger grinning brightly and unmasked at the market prompts anxiety. It gives one a desire to warn her, advise she freeze time somehow, make sure she knows to really enjoy these last weeks of 2019.

Of course, the Niemanns didn't go on to have the thriving Turkish winter they'd imagined. They'd gotten a taste of it at the beginning, when they could still go on meandering walks, go kayaking,



Irene in the Prince William Sound before heading to the Northwest Passage. Photo courtesy of Ginger and Peter Niemann

or skiing with friends.

They had flown to New York City from Turkey to receive their 2019 Far Horizons Award, honoring their first circumnavigation and completing the Northwest Passage in 2017. They had heard whispers of COVID-related shutdowns. Upon return to Europe, the whispers were becoming a reality: The world was shuttering. The Niemanns were required to self-isolate, due to having recently flown, and were forced to stay below-deck for the duration.

Life didn't improve much beyond isolation. They were now allowed above deck but nowhere else. They couldn't go for a walk; they couldn't swim; they were prohibited from stepping foot off Irene.

They had never considered flying back to the U.S.

"We never leave our boat. Ever," Ginger said.

She and Peter explain that their boat is their life. They were completely unwilling to risk leaving it in someone else's hands or entering into a maintenance nightmare after going unmaintained. So they stayed, even if it meant they were in for a very long winter.

NO ESCAPE

Ginger laughed at the comparative harshness and poked some fun at people's complaints on being restricted: "No, you have not [been], you have not been restricted, the police have not been called on you for taking a walk."

"Turkish police are no joke," Peter adds, saying a marina neighbor had been threatened when the police called him out of the water while he was cooling off with a swim.

"It was pretty intense," Ginger said. "No one was allowed out of the marina for months. It lasted months."

Five, to be exact. They were there five months before an exit plan was able to take shape. Their

options were the Panama Canal and the Suez Canal to get back to Washington. The Panama Canal then closed, leaving only the Eastern route through Indonesia. They contacted a marina there who assured them safe mooring.

They made their way there, not without a few unsettling and expensive forced stops by officials and soldiers outside of Sudan and Egypt, wherein the couple was unwillingly boarded, interrogated, and left feeling shaken down. They often had to fork over possessions or cash to conclude these stressful encounters, like a bag of Snickers, or Peter's compass. They hadn't downloaded Arabic on their Google translate apps, which made their Sudanese stop all the more challenging.

They continued, moving quickly through pirate territory, the "high-risk zone," where they kept in contact with the Japanese Navy daily. The faster they went, the lower their chances of being boarded by pirates or caught in the southwest monsoon that was already on its upswing and wouldn't let up for weeks. The wild winds allowed them to make great time but Irene was constantly smacked by waves that found their way below deck in all the cracks and crevices imaginable.

They found reprieve from the monsoon near the Maldives and caught fish for dinner and traded potato chips for fruit with a nearby fishing boat.

Going as quickly as they could, Peter and Ginger arrived two months later, covered in heat rash, out of provisions. Officials met them on the dock and refused them entry. They explained that they were out of food and water and still no entry was granted. Ginger was able to get a good Samaritan to pickup groceries for them to replenish Irene and ready her for continuing East.

They headed to Singapore, where they had been given permission to anchor offshore indefinitely; they were told to never step foot on shore.

"You can come stay on your boat on the water and never come on shore. You can stay indefinitely, you can stay for years, just don't come on shore," Ginger paraphrased.

Another five months in foreign limbo, this time anchored in the murky, warm water of Singapore, where snakes and monitor lizards loomed, and monkeys careened overhead. They knew a crocodile farm resided nearby but were promised they wouldn't wander far and that sharks wouldn't come that close to land. They didn't want to be the ones to learn differently so they stayed on-deck, save for weekly bottom-scraping to stave off the aggressive growth rate of Singapore's water.

They were isolated, alone, hot, stuck. Ferries went by all day, everyday that would roll Irene so much they couldn't set a cup down.

"You know what kinda saved us? Connectivity," said Peter. He made a phone scrolling shape with his hand.

"And we had magazines," said Ginger. They subscribed to The Economist, The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Small Boats Monthly, OffCenterHarbor. They laughed at how safe they were from COVID-19, being in the water for so long, so alone.

SETTING SAIL, AGAIN

Finally, it was time to be on the move again. The end of monsoon season meant they could start to see their journey home take shape.

First, the Niemanns were bound for Japan. They made their way in the heat, taking saltwater baths on deck to conserve water, catching fish for every meal, Irene in need or repairs, fearing a looming tropical storm.

After another month-long leg at

sea, they were welcomed ashore in Okinawa.

"We kissed the ground in Japan because we were so happy to be ashore and legal and friendly people and it was great; it was a huge thing for us," said Peter.

They did some much needed work on Irene and enjoyed the Hawaii-like climate and delicious food, making their way up the coast in three months to Hokkaido, preparing to head for Alaska.

"We love, love, loved Japan," they said.

THE TRIP HOME

Their trip across the Pacific was wet, windy, and foggy but they were grateful for the speed the weather offered and powered through to the Aleutians, trying to avoid getting too snug to the Russian coast.

After a 10-day passage, they were back on American soil, in the westernmost territory, the abandoned island of Attu, where they rested, cooked, and did Irene repairs. Onward, they explored decaying relics of World War II as they made their way through the islands.

Outside of Unalaska, they completed their second circumnavigation, one day shy of a four-year anniversary.

They celebrated ashore with beer. In Unalaska, they also completed another milestone: The Niemanns received both vaccine doses against COVID-19.

After their second dose, they sailed directly across the Gulf of Alaska and made it to Neah Bay in 10 days.

They knew Port Townsend would be home from then on. Their winter here in 2017, preparing Irene and working with Shipwright's Co-op had charmed them immensely; they started looking for a house and in November, officially put down their roots here.

Peter prefaces the potential for corniness before saying, "We've kind of lived in cool, small towns all over the world and Port Townsend is number one, I might have to say."

"This was always home," Ginger added. "We're so glad to be here."

Peter admits to "one of those marriage things" they went through, learning his lighthearted comments about moving here or there around the world were upsetting Ginger.

"I would sometimes joke about how ... let's live here. And I didn't realize ... that she hated it until later," he said.

"It was upsetting to me because he seemed serious and I was always coming home," Ginger said.

HOME FOR GOOD

Their first few weeks back they ran into about 12 people they knew at the Pourhouse and it was plenty of confirmation that Port Townsend is their home port. They love being in a sailor town with good beer and good coffee.

They won't circumnavigate again. There was no hesitation in their responses when asked if another trip is in order: "Done it twice, twice is enough," said Peter.

"Yeah, we're good with that," Ginger laughed.

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