

SKIP NOVAK

WHEN THINGS RUN THEIR NATURAL COURSE IT'S EVENTUALLY TIME TO LET SOMEONE ELSE TAKE THE HELM... SO SKIP IS DOING JUST THAT

I've reached 100 folks. Not in age, as that's still three decades away, but in the number of columns written for this esteemed magazine. Leading up to this magical, purely arbitrary number I had a think and decided this might be a good time to quiver my pen.

When the editor asked me to take over the column from Robin Knox-Johnston for the October 2014 issue of *Yachting World*, I readily agreed. Not only do I enjoy writing down my thoughts, but I had some axes to grind, scores to settle from previous civilized discussions, points to make with particular orthodoxies in the marine industry and observations of some worrying trends in boating in general. What a great soap box to climb on to!

The editor said I could write whatever I liked, including looking back anecdotally to yacht races, cruises and adventures that in my case go back a staggering 50 years plus, right to my roots in Belmont Harbour on the Chicago lakefront. I certainly have had a few stories to tell, and I told many in this column, but many of the more risqué ones are left untold with deference to some of our sensitive readers.

I took the low hanging fruit first on controversial topics as diverse as an over-preoccupation with safety, rescues at sea and why they were not necessary in the first place, how to learn how to sail (start in a Laser), automation on marine systems and navigation systems in particular and the resulting loss of first principles. You get the idea.

Never seen in print, but I know for sure that it happens in conversations, I have been accused of Luddism, retro thinking and looking back in time too often, but I was always secure in the knowledge that unless you push back every now and again on the relentless march of progress in technologies that breed conveniences there is a downside – not least of all loss of simple pleasures.

I've always made a point to be thought provoking, have tried to be balanced in my narrative, at times ironic, but always with a sense of humour.

After all, yachting is a pastime that should be enjoyed so the idea is not to take yourself too seriously for fear of really

going overboard, with or without a lifejacket.

As the years went on though, I had to be careful in not repeating myself, but I do admit to writing three articles, more or less along the same lines, about the proliferation of abandonments of yachts for no apparent reason other than discomfort. There's no doubt that over time you begin to struggle for ideas and this pressure makes your enthusiasm wane. It's similar to mustering the will when getting up for that 0400 watch in a gale on a yacht with a flush deck.

This column can be considered a big ask if done well: the need to comment on yacht racing in all its forms, on cruising both local and worldwide as well as dipping into the extremes of expedition sailing that is trending. Truth

be known it's decades since I did my last ocean race and I feel out of touch with the flying machines of today other than as an armchair onlooker, foiling vicariously. And the cruising genre now has a surfeit of YouTubers that deal in

instruction, provide cookbook travelogs, or go online just for fun. They could teach this old cruiser plenty.

That leaves me with my expertise, passion and profession of expedition sailing and it must be admitted that habitually sailing in freezing cold with snow on deck and ice in the rigging is not everyone's cup of tea, all of the time. In this regard, you'll still hear from me about my *Pelagic* adventures from time to time in the features section, rest assured.

So, it is time friends, to turn this over to hopefully a much younger person, possibly of a different gender of which there are today many, and someone with more 'skin in the game.' I wish them luck.

This column began over eight years ago with a look back to some shenanigans on England's Hamble River, my spiritual home since I came to this country of warm beer and baths rather than showers way back in 1976. I loved it all.

And it ends as I stand on the public jetty of that same river, that artery that leads to the Solent – the heart of all things yachting in this country, if not the world. Now it's time to stroll up to The King and Queen for a pint of heavy. Cheers! ■

'Yachting is a pastime that should be enjoyed'

