

# Little Or No-Cost Sailing On The Hudson River

*by Erin Ballou Otterbein*

Sailing came into my life as a result of marrying a die-hard sailor. My husband and I enjoyed many hours of sailing on the Hudson River and elsewhere, but, that came to an end when we sold our boat, "Masquerade", and dissolved our union. With no boat and little money, I mourned the loss of sailing that I had come to know. For weeks I agonized over how I, with no extra cash to spare, could continue sailing. The relaxation of cruising was always more enjoyable for me than the heart-beating, hair-raising edge of racing, but I knew that there were few, if any, cruisers looking for crew and that there were plenty of captains in need of crew for racing. Crewing for someone else on their boat is free and so off I went in search of a sailboat to jump aboard and other free or inexpensive sailing opportunities.

The Beacon Sloop Club has a web site where information can be obtained about the Woodie Guthrie, a thirty two foot, gaff-rigged Hudson River sloop. Offering free sails and opportunity to be a crew member Monday through Friday evenings, it is a great way to sail the Hudson, especially, for a first time sailing experience. As a bonus, a history of the river, the boat and, the Sloop Clubs mission is given. [www.beaconsloop.org](http://www.beaconsloop.org). There are opportunities to volunteer for a week on board the Sloop Clearwater or her sister ship, Mystic Whaler. Although there is a reasonable fee it is put to good use, such as, towards food for the crew. Or, for fifty bucks, a three hour cruise can be had from docks along the Hudson, from New York City all the way up to Albany. [www.clearwater.org](http://www.clearwater.org). By doing a web search of "sailing meet-ups", all sorts of info came up. A friend of mine and I attended one such meet-up in New York City and met several boat owners who race on Long Island Sound and were looking for crew.

My on-line searching led me to the site for the Hudson Cove Yacht Club in Haverstraw where I was able to sign up on a crew list. I went to [www.hudsoncove.com](http://www.hudsoncove.com), clicked racing and then crew registry. In a matter of days I was contacted by not one, but three captains looking for crew and I started out with the first one who had emailed me. He was rather new to sailing, even newer to racing and full of enthusiasm and hope. (Hope that at the start he wouldn't hit anyone or be hit). One week, when "Gene" wasn't able to take his boat out, I replied to captain number two who was happy to take me aboard. Richard had a nice cruising boat and just enjoyed sailing; he didn't care about winning or time and only came out in fair

weather. Racing on Richard's boat was very relaxing. I jumped on board with the third captain, Joe, and his wife, MaryAnn, for the remainder of the season. Joe was the perfect captain to have for those who know little or nothing about sailing. Always patient and calm, he preached often that it is better to do it slow and right than fast and wrong. Joe and MaryAnn's boat was big, luxurious, stocked with good food and always full of laughter. Oh, and in good wind, it was very fast! Joe hails from Minisceongo Yacht Club in Haverstraw, one of the Hudson's best little secrets, or, one that I didn't know about anyway, tucked away behind Penny Bridge Marina. Minisceongo Yacht Club participates in Wednesday night racing and also has informal weekend club races that are particularly fun for the camaraderie shared among its members. [www.minisceongoyc.org](http://www.minisceongoyc.org). At social functions following some of the races I met members of the Chelsea Yacht Club which is located just north of Newburgh on the east side of the river. A friendly and tightly knit group of members, they also race on Wednesday evenings and Sundays. I approached Mike at a BBQ following one of the HRYRA (Hudson River Yacht Racing Association) races and let him know that I was available for crew if ever he was in need. Mike's crew members are top-notch, very competitive sailors, as he is himself, and I soon knew that they were doing me a big favor by allowing me on board. It was an enlightening experience and I learned much, such as, I was more of a hindrance than helper on their boat! [www.chelseayacht.org](http://www.chelseayacht.org). Also participating in plenty of racing are members of the Nyack Boat Club just north of the Tarrytown Bridge. Like Chelsea, it is all about sailing here. Having been a member there with my former spouse, I know first hand that it too is a great club that offers opportunities for those who wish to get out on the Hudson and sail. According to member David, show up at the rear of the club house by 5pm on Wednesdays and inquire about crewing opportunities. [www.nyackboatclub.org](http://www.nyackboatclub.org).

Since venturing out on my own, I've bounced from boat to boat, club to club, and have encountered a cornucopia of personality among the many captains whose boats I've been crew on. Most are calm, there's a yeller and curser or two (never to be taken personally), ones who race purely for the love of the sport and those who hate to lose. Although there are single-handlers among racers, most of them need crew. So if you want to sail but are short on funds, crewing for others is free.