



# WindCheck

*Sailing the Northeast*




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## On Watch - Heather & Nate Atwater

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As the Flotilla Cruise Guides with Offshore Sailing School's popular Colgate Sailing Adventures, Heather & Nate Atwater are enjoying a life that most sailors only dream about.

"I was four when I first sailed," recalls Nate, who was born in Little Compton, Rhode Island. "That was on the English Channel, but I grew up sailing and racing out of Sakonnet Yacht Club. I learned the love of the ocean and its surrounding environment from my father."

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"I was born on City Island, New York and raised in Rye, and have sailed my entire life," says Heather, who cites her father, Herb Hild (1928 - 2016), a champion yachtsman and the founder of Hild Sails, as her primary mentor. "Also my sister Hope, with whom I raced Etchells #35 for many years, and the late Lorna Whittelsley Hibberd, an American Yacht Club member and five-time

Women's National Sailing Champion who was windsurfing into her 80s. Lorna taught me, by example, that you never grow out of sailing."

"I left a job in insurance to pursue my love of sailing and ended up at Offshore Sailing School on City Island, teaching folks how to sail," says Nate. Heather was working at Hild Sails at the time, managing 15 employees as well as all aspects of the company's marketing, sales, finance, purchasing, sail design, manufacturing, and customer service. "In the summer of 1990, Nate brought sails from Offshore Sailing School into my Dad's loft," she says. "We met and started dating. There was a spark between us, and we got engaged that winter on Sanibel Island and married a year later."

"Nate was heading off to do the Newport Bermuda Race in June 2016," says Heather. "He said, 'Heath, when I get back from Bermuda you've got to help me find a new job...telecom is killing me!' Searching online for his new profession, I asked myself, 'When was the last time Nate was truly happy at his work?' That was before we were married, when Nate was Branch Director and Instructor at Offshore Sailing School. I thought, 'Well, it'd be a hell of a pay cut but let's just have a look at their website. The first thing that popped up when I hit the 'Careers' button was 'Cruising Couple Wanted'. I thought, 'We could do that!'"

In addition to exploring and formulating new options for Colgate Sailing Adventures, Heather & Nate personally lead each flotilla cruise. "Since we started to run the flotillas we've gone to the Abacos, San Juan Islands, St. Lucia and the Grenadines, the Amalfi Coast of Italy, and Belize," says Heather. "Doris & Steve Colgate ran the flotillas for many years before we were involved, and they are still very much involved. Together we discuss different venues, but ultimately the decision of where and when to go is theirs."

"The cruises typically have between four and six boats and 20 to 30 people," Heather continues. "The 2018 flotillas are totally booked, but we have the Saronic Gulf of the Greek Islands and Tahiti to look forward to. We have a number of exciting flotillas planned for 2019: St. Lucia to Grenada (February 1-9), Grenada to St. Lucia (February 9-17), Mallorca (June 29-July 6), Agana to Dubrovnik, Croatia (August 24-31), and Dubrovnik to Agana (August 31-September 7)."

"We have a land hold in Stonington, Connecticut but currently live aboard our venerable 1980 Pearson 40 *Moonshine*," says Heather. "She's an old IOR design, flush-deck whale, fat-bottom girl. We call her '*Classique Plastique*.' Her previous owner, the late Gerry Fand, passed her to us in good condition but she did need a lot of work. Nate totally ground down, faired and repainted the bottom, replaced all the through-hull fittings and internal hoses, installed a new windlass and anchor, new water heater and pump, refrigeration, a new head, all new electronics and wiring, radar with pole, and dinghy davits...and I'm sure there's a lot I forgot!"

"We moved aboard *Moonshine* in October 2017 and cruised from Stonington down to Key West and then on to the Dry Tortugas and back up to Key Largo where we jumped across the Gulf Stream to Bimini, where we began our Bahamian Adventure," says Heather. "We had a fair amount of, shall we say, vigorous sailing as we made our way from Bimini to Chubb Cay and down the Exumas to Georgetown. Then we headed back up the Exumas, visiting some places we missed on the way down, crossed over from Highbourne Cay to Rock Sound, Eleuthera and on to the Abacos, and then back across to Vero Beach, Florida."

Members of American Yacht Club, Sakonnet Yacht Club and Off Soundings Club, Heather & Nate have two sons, Nate and Bert. "They both like to sail...one more than the other!" Nate chuckles. "They both grew up aboard our Beneteau 30 *Showtime* and cruised with us every summer, and they attended Pettipaug Yacht Club's excellent sailing program in the summers."

"I love to race and cruise," says Nate. "I love the camaraderie and competition that comes with racing, and the exploration and discovery that comes with cruising." Heather adds, "I love sailing for its raw beauty, adventure, freedom and simplicity."

issues on watch Offshore Sailing School 2018 june\_2018 Heather & Nate Atwater

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