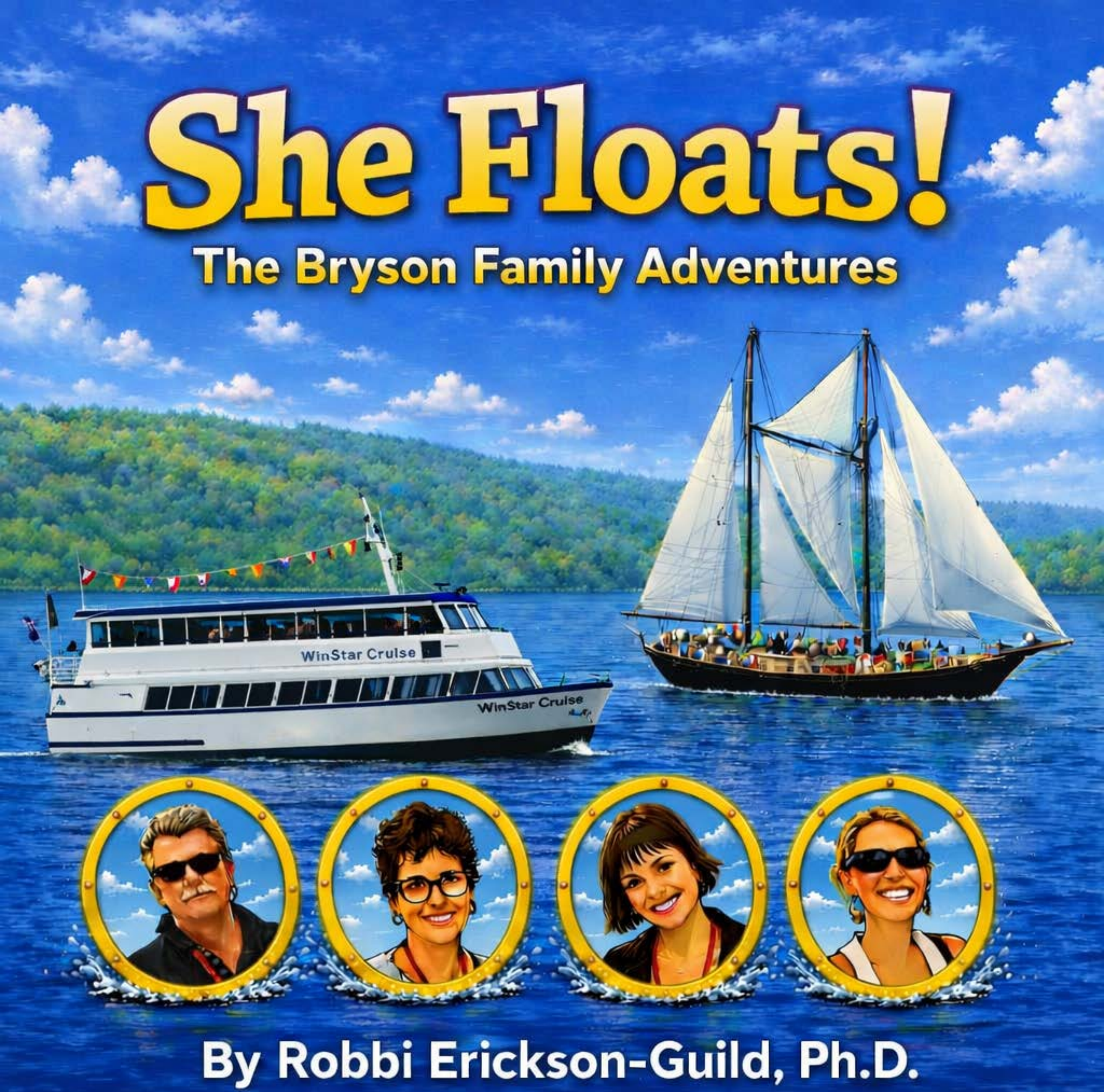
She Floats!

The Bryson Family Adventures



By Robbi Erickson-Guild, Ph.D.

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ISBN: 9798196842351

The Bryson Family and Amoebatours.com provided family photos of their adventures.

Original artwork was created by Robbi Erickson-Guild using Corel Draw.

Microsoft CoPilot was used to create, edit, and restore some images.

OpenAI. (2026). *ChatGPT* (May 2026 version) [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com was used to restore family photos for clarity and to enhance printing quality.

The image of Gagnon, Québec was restored using CoPilot. The original image is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/en:Creative_Commons and https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en

Grammerly.com was used for editing and revision suggestions.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to everyone who helped shape the *Amoeba's* legacy, those we lost along the way and miss dearly, and those who somehow survived the adventures. It is also dedicated to up-and-coming and future generations of Brysons. May you inherit the Bryson sense of humor, love of the water, and the family tradition of setting out with a good plan… and returning with a better story.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the help of the entire Bryson family. They shared their stories and pictures and enthusiastically opened their hearts to the process. The world is forever blessed by their spirit, their energy, and their warmth.

It should be noted that some of the stories in this book were woven together from many different perspectives and experiences across several trips to the Caribbean, as is customary with oral traditions. However, while some creative license was taken, the stories and sentiments are authentic and based on fact.

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Prologue: Meet the Brysons



Image courtesy of Robbi Erickson-Guild

I first met the Bryson family back in 2023. I was in the middle of a great American midlife crisis and struggling to understand who I was and what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I had decided to immigrate to Canada and was laying the groundwork by getting a temporary work permit and moving in with my then-boyfriend and now husband, Danny.

The first Bryson I met was Bev. Like Danny, she was originally from the U.K., and the two of them had first crossed paths more than ten years earlier when he immigrated to Nova Scotia. He was staying at a hotel in Cape Breton, where she worked as the Food and Beverage Manager. Seeing him as a kindred spirit and a bit of a lost soul, she took him under her wing, showing him around, introducing him to people in the area, and welcoming him as a new friend and member of the family. I met her through Danny and immediately realized what a special person she was. As an empath, my first impressions of people are based on their energy, and her energy was radiant and warm. She was genuine, compassionate, and a bit mischievous, which I loved. She had a sense of spirituality that wrapped around you, made you feel seen and appreciated, and that validated your existence without her having to say a word. I felt at ease with her from the start, which was something that rarely happened to me as someone with



Image courtesy of Bev Bryson

AuDHD. We became friends, and as I learned more about her, her life, and her family, the more in love I fell.



Image courtesy of Laura Bryson

Bev's daughter, Laura, was the next member of the family I met. She had a lot of the same beautiful qualities as her mother. She was compassionate, intelligent, and quirky. Still, her energy was unique, with a seamless blending of youthful enthusiasm and wonder, and mature wisdom and worldliness. She reminded me a lot of my best friend from grade school, someone who always understood me, even when I made no sense to anyone else. It wasn't until I met her father, John Bryson, however, that I understood where her sense of humor and joviality came from.

I met John shortly after I lost my dad to liver failure and my 28-year-old son to a cerebral aneurysm. John was quite the character, always ready with a joke, usually made at his own expense. Even with his outgoing and charismatic personality, his energy was laid back, approachable, steadfast, and protective, everything that you want in a captain of a boat. He told great stories about his experiences with the *Amoeba*, the first boat his family built when he was a boy, and with the *WinStar*, the new boat. While you sometimes had to stitch together the stories told over days, weeks, or months in his company, the result was a chronicle of the amazing adventures the Brysons experienced over the last six decades.



Image courtesy of the Bryson Family



Image courtesy of the Bryson Family photograph collection

The last member of the family that I met was Kristy, Bev and John's eldest daughter. She was visiting from Guam, where she lived with her husband and two young children. She happened to be in Cape Breton with her family while Danny and I were in town to celebrate his 56th birthday on the WinStar. She was very laid-back but had an endless supply of physical energy. She remained in constant motion, running and moving about, and chasing after her kids. Even in her still moments, though, she pulsed with energy, almost as if she was powering the universe around her.

Over the last three years, during countless visits to each other's homes and aboard the WinStar, they have shared their stories, hopes, and dreams for the future of their family and the business. Their love and support for Danny and me have meant more to me than anything else I can think of. I hope that by sharing a little bit about them and their family story, more people will get the chance to have a Bryson experience and feel the warmth, sense of community, and pure joy that they freely give to those fortunate enough to cross paths with them. But where to begin?

Chapter 1: In the Beginning



Image created using ChatGPT, 2026

Where do you begin a family adventure story? How far back do you go?

Modern storytelling trends dictate that you should start right in the middle of the action. But the Bryson family adventures don't fit neatly into modern rules. To understand how this family became who they are, you must go all the way back. Not just to the beginning of the Brysons themselves, but to the astronomical event that set the stage for their future home in Gagnon, Québec.

About 214 million years ago (yes, we're truly starting at the beginning), a ten-kilometer-wide asteroid slammed into what is now Québec. The impact carved out one of the largest craters on Earth, about 100 kilometers wide, or about the size of the Greater Toronto Area, when measured east to west. That was the size of the divot left by this magnificent piece of the universe.



Created by CoPilot, 2026

The explosion blasted molten rock and dust high into the atmosphere, scattering debris as far as the eastern United States, more than 1,000 kilometers from the impact site. The heat was so intense it melted the surrounding bedrock, twisting and reshaping it into new forms. And, most importantly for our story, the impact left behind hundreds of millions of tons of iron, which would become the economic foundation of the future townsite of Gagnon.



Created by CoPilot, 2026

It was this iron that attracted the Québec Cartier Mining Company, which set up shop just south of the crater and built the boom town of Gagnon, Québec. It was also the iron that encouraged the Bryson Family to move to this area and set in motion the chain of events that would lead them to build a boat that would change all their lives. The Brysons' story begins, therefore, not just with the family, but with a meteor, a crater the size of the Greater Toronto Metropolitan Area, and a heavenly supply of iron ore.

Gagnon, Québec, Canada



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This image was created by Copilot 2026.

At the head of the Bryson family stood Roy. He was intelligent, creative, and a big dreamer. He rarely let conventions or a lack of knowledge and experience stop him from achieving what he wanted. He simply made a decision, learned all he could to facilitate his success, and then turned to his family for support in getting the job done.

Roy joined the Québec Cartier Mining Company in 1958, which owned and operated the Lac Jeannine mine site at Gagnon, Québec. This was a rugged and remote work opportunity, but it promised a lucrative future. By the fall of 1959, Roy's family became one of the first pioneers to move into the brand-new townsite. Their arrival there was a traffic-stopper, with furniture, a small boat, a five-horsepower motor, and a makeshift trailer all flown in on a DC-3. The boat and trailer together were only worth about $325, but the fact that they were shipped separately on a private plane was priceless. When someone joked that Roy's move cost more than the President's, he grinned and said humbly, "That sure made my day."

By 1964, the Brysons had moved farther south to Port Cartier, a coastal town and major railroad hub that was considered one of Québec's busiest by raw tonnage. While the industry was well-established and thriving, Port Cartier was still fresh, young, and a little wild. Neighborhoods were close-knit because people depended on each other for survival in this new settlement. Roy, always on the move, loved the port, the boats, and the water. This love made what came next almost unavoidable.

The boat was called the *Ore Miner*, a 32-foot steel boat that once ferried pilots out to massive ore carriers offshore. In its prime, it had been sturdy, dependable, and an essential piece of equipment. It now awaited its next owner, disheveled, rusted, and abandoned in the scrapyard, with the insulting auction headline "as is, where is" attached to it. Most people walked past it without a second glance. But Roy stopped and saw the possibility of something great, even if a bit comical.

Roy didn't consult Frances, his wife and partner in life, about the bid or the boat. He didn't even think about it. Inspiration had struck, and when that happened, Roy tended to move with the momentum of a man who trusted that things would just work out in the end. He jotted down a bid for $2,500 and handed it in, never thinking it would be accepted in a million years.



This image was created with ChatGPT, and based on Roy Bryson's journal.

No photo of the *Ore Miner* survives. This image is based on the type of tugboat used by the mining industry in Québec in the 1960s and 1970s. It is likely similar to what Roy's boat looked like in its prime. However, it is not what it looked like when he bought it.

For about 4 months, Roy didn't think about the bid. The entire prospect simply slipped his mind. However, his memory was jogged one afternoon when the phone rang.

Roy answered casually, expecting a routine call from work. Instead, a voice from the purchasing department asked, "What do you want to do with your boat?"

Roy's body tensed with a hit of adrenaline, "What boat? I don't own a boat."

"You do now. You won *The Ore Miner,*" the man said.

For a moment, Roy simply stood there, stunned into silence. He had actually won. His ridiculous, low-ball offer had been the highest, or more likely, the only bid. Now, for richer or poorer, the *Ore Miner* was his.

He hung up the phone as a giddy grin slowly spread across his face, equal parts shock and excitement. He had a boat, but what would Frances think? While telling his wife about the boat should have occupied his every thought, it didn't. The impetus of the dream growing in him crowded out that domestic concern from his mind. All he could think about was getting the *Ore Miner* home and turning it into something his wife would love.

By suppertime, the *Ore Miner* was parked proudly, if not somewhat absurdly, in the Brysons' backyard. The neighbors on 5th Street peered out their windows, trying to make sense of the sight of a 32-foot retired tugboat perched on blocks behind a modest bungalow. The other housewives had seen Frances' reaction when the boat arrived, and everyone in the neighborhood waited patiently for the show to start, noses pressed firmly against the glass. They gossiped amongst themselves, waiting for the fight that would ultimately take place once Roy got home.

When Roy got home that night, Frances was waiting for him. Stepping outside, she wiped her hands on a tea towel, preparing for an explanation for the hulking mass of rust and rivets now dominating her view of the garden. Her weight shifted with wifely consternation, as she pointed at the *Ore Miner* and demanded, "What is *that* piece of junk doing here?"

Roy, who had been admiring the boat proudly, launched into an enthusiastic account of his plan. He chose to use a rapid-fire strategy to get out all the good points about the boat before the reality of it could set in. He promised to restore every inch of the boat and to take the entire family on adventures aboard it. Trying to appeal to her maternal instincts, he described the *Ore Miner* as if he were talking about one of his kids. He boasted about its build, citing its sturdy bones and smooth contours, and about how it would, one day, outshine anything else on the water. His description was so enthusiastic and heartfelt that it was hard not to get carried away and see the vision Roy saw.

Frances, familiar with her husband's whimsy and impulsivity, was less enthusiastic. "I'll never set foot on that ugly thing," she pronounced, arms crossed, her tone leaving no room for accommodation.

Roy paused. He knew that tone. He also knew that if he wanted smooth sailing at home, he'd need more than optimism and a slick line. He'd need diplomacy, strategy, a little charm, and perhaps a touch of showmanship.

So, he did what any clever husband with a dream and a rusty boat would do: he promised his wife he'd create something that she would love, and he gave her more power over the project. If the *Ore Miner* was to become a proper vessel, it needed an admiral, and who better than Frances to take that position? With a bit of fanfare and a grin pleading for approval, he promoted her on the spot.

From that moment on, Frances Bryson was known, at least within the borders of their backyard shipyard and among their children, as "the Admiral." Roy tipped his hat every time she passed, a playful salute that made her roll her eyes but also softened her stance. It was this good-natured mutiny and gentle rebellion that kept the peace at home. However, Frances still insisted she'd never set foot on *that thing*.

Despite her resistance to the new addition to the family, Roy noticed her lingering at the window when he worked on the boat. The Admiral, it seemed, was keeping an eye on her fleet.

Transforming the old *Ore Miner* from a rust-eaten, dilapidated work-worn tug into a sleek cruising boat was no trivial task. In fact, it was the kind of project that would have sent a lesser man running for the hills, or at least back to the seller for a refund. But Roy Bryson was not a lesser man. He was an innovator with the skill to back up his dreams, and he was a husband who had already learned that sometimes the best way to win an argument was simply to build something so impressive that the argument was forgotten in awe.

For nearly two years, the Brysons' backyard became a shipyard. The neighbors grew used to the melody of grinding, clanking, and operatic bursts of colorful language when a stubborn bolt refused to cooperate. Roy worked evenings, weekends, holidays, and any spare hour he could steal from the demands of his job and his family. He welded new plates onto the hull, sanded away decades of rust, and rebuilt the wheelhouse board by board. He went over

every inch of the vessel's body, patching, painting, strengthening, and polishing, until it was perfect. Still, the Admiral, in her full rank and authority, maintained her official position: the *Ore Miner* was still one hell of an ugly boat.

Visitors frequently stopped by, drawn in by their curiosity about a 32-foot steel boat docked next to the family car. They'd offer their support, run their hands along the smooth new paint, and say things like, "Roy, she's really shaping up!"

Roy would beam with pride and give an optimistic glance to the Admiral, hoping for a reprieve or a simple response that indicated she agreed. However, she was a stern leader and would not give in until something more remarkable was delivered. While she would never let on, she did see the transformation taking place, but her pride dictated a little more brooding before she would admit that to Roy.

Fortunately, compliments have a way of gaining weight and traction, and eventually even the Admiral ended up conceding to the reality of the situation. After enough praise piled up to sink a dinghy, she finally yielded, albeit prudently and begrudgingly, that perhaps, *maybe*, the old tug had potential.

Once the transformation was complete, the Brysons were ready for a real adventure. The boat, now christened *John Marc* after two of their sons, gleamed with new life. It was no longer a scrap-yard relic. Instead, it was now a proud little cruiser that the Brysons were excited to try out. They decided to take it on a month-long voyage from Port Cartier to Québec City, a bold plan for a family whose previous vacations had involved far fewer planning challenges and technical risks. This trip would not just test the boat's soundness and performance but also teach them how to steer the damn thing.

The trip was just what the family needed. After years of hard work, the *John Marc* finally delivered on Roy's promise. As they cruised the wide sweep of the St. Lawrence River, they admired the beauty of nature and the passing villages from the vantage point of the water. They watched the tides ebb and flow and the wind blowing over the river like the sweet breath of God, as they listened to the songs sung by the vessel as they moved over rocks and debris.

The kids sprawled on the deck with books and binoculars, pointing out seals and seabirds. Frances prepared coffee as best she could with the available implements, a morning ritual she refused to give up, regardless of the situation. Roy was at the helm, steady and content, as though he had been born with a wheel in his hands. The family soaked in the experience, accepting the feeling of freedom and pure joy that a life on the water offered.

By the time they returned to Port Cartier, sunburned and river-wise, Roy and the Admiral agreed on one thing with absolute certainty: "retirement on a boat was the way to go." However, that decision raised the next big question: "What kind of boat would best suit that purpose?"

Two options were debated: powerboat and sailboat. A powerboat offered space, comfort, and the reassurance of the roar of an engine. But it was expensive to run and not nearly as safe for long ocean passages. Sailboats, on the other hand, were safer, more economical, and a bit more romantic. However, it also seemed a bit riskier because of their limited sailing experience (which, by the way, was none).

While both options were intriguing and had pros and cons, the decision boiled down to which option would meet the Admiral's standards. She wanted comfort, *real comfort*, the kind that included "toast and coffee in the morning," and came with complete living quarters below deck. Roy agreed wholeheartedly. If they were going to live at sea, they weren't going to rough it. They had done their share of roughing it already, raising children, moving towns, working long shifts, and restoring a boat that had previously been declared "junk" by the Admiral herself.

After a long debate, the choice was made: sailboat. However, reality knocked Roy and Frances off their feet. The price of a sailboat big enough to satisfy their expectations and needs was simply out of reach. But Frances knew that given enough time to brainstorm, Roy could still make their retirement dream come true. After much deliberation, Roy concluded that the solution was simple, and the *Ore Miner* had set the precedent. Instead of buying a ready-made sailboat, they would build one.

However, could they build a large sailboat from scratch?