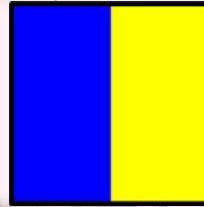


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Southport Yacht Club Member Profile: Colleen McMahon Smith

Where She's Supposed to Be

Serendipity has been good to Colleen McMahon.

It's allowed her to land in a perfect spot, Southport, and have a cadre of great friends, many of them, like herself, Club members.

"Many times I've sat and thought there's no way I could have ever assembled a better group of friends—who are fun, caring, kind, true friends—and this would be a very lonely place without them," she recently ruminated.

Colleen is also known as Colleen B because when she came to the boating social circle there was already a Colleen—Club member Colleen Webster, who was catapulted to Colleen A. But as one of the Club's handful of social members who don't own a boat, Colleen B is anything but second string.

You'll find her offering to climb someone's mast to help with a repair or to volunteer to crew for races (or be drink wench).

Youth: Born in Detroit, Colleen went to a Christian liberal arts college on the border of TN and GA and majored in education. But tuition strained her financially so she left without completing her degree.

She moved back to Detroit. In hindsight, she wishes she completed the degree there, but instead, like many of us, she made what was probably not the best choices (ah, youth!). But she managed to become a certified medical assistant. She was outgrowing her hometown. And she knew she needed to grow up.

She was 23 years old and had saved money to go on a cruise with some friends. Even today, she has the wanderlust. However, an incident she'd had when she was a child — being hit in the mouth with a soda bottle that required lots of dental work — came back to haunt her. She had to go back to the dentist to address an abscess. The cost of it came out of the cruising kitty, nearly decimating it. (Fast future: More required dental work recently cost her a planned trip to Ireland. Wanderlust denied.)

She had enough cash left over after the cruise sidetrack to soothe her heartbreak by flying to Augusta to visit a college roommate and her husband. New friends she made there learned what she did for work, hooked her up with a pediatrician and three weeks later, she got a job in Augusta. Ah, fate.

She grew up, married a man who worked in a bank, and they moved to Atlanta, where they had their first son, Dan. Then they were transferred to Charlotte,



Colleen B prepares to climb TideChaser's mast as Walt, Jane and Eric offer guidance.

where their second son, Zak, was born and where they lived for 23 years before separating in 2011.

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Shortly thereafter, Colleen’s good friends got an apartment they planned to use as a vacation home at Marina View in Southport. They gave Colleen the key and she often came here for long weekends.

“This was my safe haven,” she recalls. “And then I heard about the book and the movie” filmed in town. After a year of visiting this safe haven by the sea and returning to Charlotte “with tears,” Colleen applied for a job—a single job, her first in the area—and got it. But there was a little glitch.

She’d just signed a one-year lease on an apartment in Charlotte. She still decided to find a place in Southport and work out that detail later. She talked to a realtor she’d come to know in town, telling her tale of housing woe. Turns out the realtor’s mom was moving into a retirement home and they didn’t know what to do with her home. She said Colleen could rent the house for the cost of utilities. And on her last day of work in Charlotte, Colleen found a renter for her apartment there. She told her Southport landlord of her good change in fortune and was offered a very sweet rental deal, nonetheless. Kismet, again.

The landlord eventually sold the house but it only took Colleen two days to find her current place to live, where she’s settled in.

She’s always wanted to live at the beach. Early on in her Southport days, she met Jamie and Gwen, who had moved back to Southport after having lived in Vermont for a bit. She began hanging out with them and other boaters, eventually crewing for races (where she learned there’s a lot to learn) and boating to the sandbar. Soon her circle of friends grew and now



includes many Club members. As with many transplants here, her new friends became her surrogate family.

Oh, and that wanderlust? It’s soon to be fulfilled. Next week she’ll get the first stamp in her passport when she goes to the BVI (British Virgin Islands), where some Club members are participating in the regatta.

“You look back on things and you think, ‘I’m meant to be here; this is good,’” she reflects.

