|  |
| --- |
| The Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.)July 17, 1987 **Section:** PEOPLE **Edition:** THE BATON ROUGE MORNING ADVOCATE **Page:** 1-D Pursuing a dream \*\*\* Cruising down the Mississippi *ED CULLEN* When Johan **Sandstrom** was a boy, he read Mark Twain and dreamed of his own trip, someday, down the Mississippi River. Mortgages and marriage and business can dash the dreams of youth. In **Sandstrom**'s case, they only pushed the starting point of his dream a couple of thousand miles to the west.**Sandstrom** and his wife, Marci, may be the only Mississippi River adventurers to begin their journey in Los Angeles harbor.Having never piloted a boat of any kind, **Sandstrom**, who owns a computer design company in Manhattan Beach, Calif., thought the little houseboat in L.A. harbor adequate to his needs. He bought the boat for $15,000, spent four hours cruising the harbor and, then, stored the boat. Oh, he named the boat The Puss 'n Booze, affirming his commitment to serious boating.The tab for trucking the houseboat to St. Paul, Minn., purchase of the boat and expenses over the 1,800-mile trip from a bridge in Minneapolis to Head of Passes below New Orleans will come to $36,000.The Sandstroms left Minneapolis June 5 and expected to reach Head of Passes about mid-July. The couple got to St. Paul May 25 to begin making preparations for the journey.**Sandstrom** had taken a Coast Guard boating course before leaving Southern California. He spent a week on the upper Mississippi on a shakedown cruise. He ran into a lock wall.The boat has a well deck forward for no apparent reason the Sandstroms' can fathom, unless it's to make sinking easier. Near Cape Girardeau, Mo., the well deck filled with water from the wake of a motor vessel pushing a line of barges. Marci **Sandstrom** tells the story with lots of arm waving.Marci **Sandstrom**, Johan's partner in life and business, is a gamer. She has run the couple's business by telephone the last two months. She does impersonations of herself trying to communicate with lock masters 40 feet above her head."The real adventure is the lower Mississippi," she says. "The upper part is just boating."There are few people below Cairo, Ill., she says. There are no marinas. There are plenty of sandbars and shoals.Many of the river's industries have shut down because of a poor economy, Marci **Sandstrom** says. River traffic is down as a result. The Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, starting at the Tennessee River on the Tennessee-Mississippi border and running 234 miles to Alabama's Tombigbee River, provides a shortcut to the Gulf of Mexico for vessels coming from the upper Mississippi and the Ohio rivers. The waterway has further reduced traffic on the lower Mississippi, the Sandstroms say."For us, it's been like we're the first boat ever to travel the river," Marci **Sandstrom** says.**Sandstrom**'s trial by lock on the upper river left him with a feeling of foreboding. Then, someone told him which marine radio channel the locks monitor. Just call ahead and tell the lock he was coming, **Sandstrom**'s benefactor said.The first time **Sandstrom** tried it, back came this reassuring response:"All right, Cap. We'll pump it up for you."What does being called "Cap" mean to the master of a 23-foot houseboat?**Sandstrom** searches for words."You loved it," his wife says.On the lower river, **Sandstrom** added whistle commands to his river knowledge. On the lower river, boat captains use a whistle code to tell oncoming vessels or vessels they're overtaking on which side they intend to pass.On the lower river, **Sandstrom**'s houseboat was dubbed "knee-high" by the skippers of powerful motor vessels that towered over the little pleasure craft.The Sandstroms have been joined by friends for a few days at a time. **Sandstrom**'s 69-year-old parents spent a week aboard the boat. Martin and Mary Lou Taylor of Hayward, Calif., were aboard the Puss 'n Booze when the boat docked here at the foot of Main Street.The night tied up at St. Francisville is one Mary Lou Taylor will remember."It was hot, and the boat rocked all night," she says.The Puss 'n Booze is not air conditioned.The Sandstroms' have endured high temperatures and humidity since the first day."It was 105 degrees in Minnesota," he says. "It was hot all the way through Iowa."Baton Rouge thermometers were stuck at 95 degrees the day the Sandstroms and the Taylors were here."Adventure is not necessarily fun," **Sandstrom** says, quoting something he read once.**Sandstrom** plans a diversion through Southwest Pass, across open water to the bayou country below Houma and into New Orleans through the Intracoastal Water Way. By July 21, he thinks he'll be looking for a place in New Orleans to store the boat.rom Detroit to Diluth might, finally, exhaust the Sandstroms' waterlust."If we're not sick to death of it or haven't sunk it or haven't gone broke, we might ship the boat to Seattle," **Sandstrom** says. "After that sixth summer, I doubt we'll ever set foot on a boat again." **Illustration:** PHOTOJohan **Sandstrom** Marci **Sandstrom** Martin and Mary Lou Taylor on the Capital Marine (John Boss Morning Advocate)Copyright 1987 Capital City Press, Baton Rouge, La. |