

Pragmatic**Stories**

BRUCE TATE
with photographs by Maggie Tate

Currently Away

How Two Disenchanted People Traveled
the Great Loop for Nine Months and Returned
to the Start, Energized and Optimistic



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Foreword

Currently Away is anything but away. Bruce shares the story of himself and his wife who, after two difficult years, untie the lines and leave the dock for the unknown. During their nine-month journey, they'd challenge their boating skills in ways they didn't expect and be forced to grow as individuals and in their relationship. They'd experience meaningful connections that would reshape their definition of community.

We first met Bruce and his wife, Maggie, in one of our favorite small towns along the Great Loop in Oriental, North Carolina. Bruce, Maggie, and motor vessel (MV) *Currently* had preceded themselves, as we heard about them through the looper grapevine. Loopers talk, and when a young, friendly couple made their way through docktails and sundowners, pretty soon everyone knew about *Currently*. I knew we would hit it off. We met them at a local restaurant and enjoyed a meal while getting to know them personally. I knew we'd connect with their adventurous personalities. We also learned about their diet. On their Instagram @currentlytheboat, we discovered that one unique part of their loop was that, due to dietary restrictions, they cooked vegan food in their small galley. I saw these boaters who had a specific diet, which meant they had to be creative with the lack of resources and space. That's something I admire and appreciate in others. Our friendship would be more than standard meat and potatoes and instead would be full of

flavor, variety, and originality. I knew we would like them even before we met.

The Great Loop is a six-thousand-mile boating journey that is most popular with retirees, so anyone who is not a traditional American retired age stands out. Being the "kids" on the loop (we're both thirty-one years old at the time this is written), we instantly hit it off with the "young loopers," who we deemed were people who had kids our age but no grandkids yet. Bruce and Maggie fit into this group, not just in age but also in spirit. Bruce and Maggie were the brave parents who ventured off on this grand adventure like we did. Throughout our Great Loop experience, many of the "young loopers" would be our anchors, providing us with friendships that we continue to value today.

The Great Loop has this ability to connect people like no other community we've experienced. A white, sometimes yellow or gray flag, called a burgee, with the America's Great Loop Cruiser's Association logo on a boat's bow is an instant connection. We share miles, relate experiences, and have similar trials and tribulations that challenge us all in unique but similar ways. *Currently Away* depicts the challenges of buying a new boat, learning how to maneuver it, the fear behind untying the lines for the very first time, and knowing that you won't be returning for about twelve months and six thousand miles. Many "loopers," as we're termed, understand what it's like to cruise day after day in unknown waters. To be miles away from your home port and have to problem-solve boat issues that arise is challenging and scary, yet it's something that unites us as loopers. As someone who has cruised on days we should have stayed put, or has learned the hard lesson of putting all of your trust in your captain or first mate, we understand the value of Bruce's vulnerability in *Currently Away* as he shares the challenges he faced on the Great Loop.

All loopers are looking for something: an adventure in retirement, a healing process after a traumatic event, or a challenge to complete a journey rarer than summitting

Everest. Loopers are not content, because otherwise they would never leave the dock. This desire for something more, something that we strive for in our travels, connects us with each other. We all have our "pre-loop" story that explains what led us to this grand adventure. We then make our "loop stories," which are the experiences that changed us as boaters, travelers, and people. Later we go into our "post-loop life," where many of us crave the daily adventure we experienced traveling on the Great Loop—where problem-solving, planning routes in new territories, learning new skills such as mechanics or reading the weather, enjoying new places, and sharing these waterways with comrades was part of our daily life. Once people cross their wake and complete their loop, this motif is frequently shared. This search for more is what Bruce shares in *Currently Away*.

Bruce's introspection and analysis throughout *Currently Away* capture the essence of the journey around America's Great Loop. Throughout *Currently Away*, Bruce explains the challenges he's faced in the past two years as a high-risk patient for Covid, the learning curve to operating and maintaining a boat, and the deep desire to integrate his friends and family into this adventure. Elliot and I also tell the story of every day on the loop through our YouTube channel and reinforce how this adventure is more about the journey than the destination. This trip is full of highs and lows, and you can't appreciate the highs without taking stock of the lows. This interest in sharing our personal experiences with others is something we share in common with Bruce.

Throughout the book, you quickly understand the heart Bruce has to share this adventure with others. Before their adventure began, they opted to postpone their departure so they could spend more time with their kids, putting them in the back of the "looper pack." Throughout the book, they welcome various guests aboard, disregarding the "never have a schedule on a boat" mentality for the value community and close companionship bring them. A schedule brings

significant trade-offs, and because of their choice to schedule, we gain insight into who Bruce is; it's heartwarming to read about Bruce's passion for community and the journey that led him to better understand his world, country, and the challenges that strengthened his relationships. Bruce went from a period of being lost and uncertain to opening his heart as he set out a welcome mat to his modest boat to anyone around them. Bruce is vulnerable in ways that loopers and boaters can commiserate on encountering nasty weather, making less-than-ideal decisions, and telling the stories of being scared at times. He shares the "life" that goes on while embarking on this journey through the losses of a sibling and a beloved family member. Reading *Currently Away*, we felt as if we were along for the ride, reliving much of our own loop experience but through the lens of *Currently*.

Seven months after meeting Bruce and Maggie in North Carolina, we reunited with them as we made our way to Chattanooga, on the Tennessee River side trip. We instantly were reintroduced to Bruce's nerdiness and concern for safety and our well-being, and to Maggie's larger-than-life, welcoming, and warm personality. During our two weeks in Chattanooga, we enjoyed dinner with them three times, including Thanksgiving dinner. During that time, Bruce and Maggie welcomed anyone transiting the Tennessee River into their home so they could intentionally share the hospitality, generosity, and connection that they received on the Great Loop. It was clear that in their daily life in Chattanooga they were focused on making changes in their "post-loop" life to incorporate the lessons and takeaways from their six-thousand-mile journey. Maggie's warm personality is the heart of the home, which comes across instantly when you meet her, and Bruce consistently engaged in meaningful and thought-provoking conversations. Each time we left Bruce and Maggie's home, we were blown away by their continued kindness as they treated us like family while also being entranced in deep thought,

instilling in us the importance of critical thinking and open-mindedness.

We understood that *MV Currently* and this grand adventure was much more than just deepening their marriage, building confidence as boaters and problem solvers, and strengthening friendships and relationships with their daughters. It's through the tribulations over six thousand miles that they revitalized their deep passion for community and for sharing some of life's best moments both with the people they love and the friends they didn't know they had yet on the loop. *Currently Away* is here to take you on a thought-provoking journey into a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Jennifer Johnson (and Elliot Schoenfeld)

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