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Stuck on the ice

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Harald and Silvia Paul have been living a life of adventure and risk for the past 15 years. They spent this past winter living on their boat anchored in Terrington Basin.

Photo by Derek Montague/The Labradorian

German adventurers spent winter in Labrador aboard boat

Harald and Silvia Paul have been living a life of adventure and risk for the past 15 years.

During that time, they have called the ocean their home as they sail to different parts of the world looking for wildlife and beautiful natural scenery.

The German couple have been through it all, from rough seas to scary encounters with polar bears.

But this year Silvia and Harald had a unique experience, even by their standards, aboard their vessel *Gypsy Life*.

During the whole winter of 2014-15 their boat — and by extension, themselves — was trapped in the ice near the main docks in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

The couple arrived in Labrador in September, first visiting Nain — a town they visited five years before — and arriving at the docks in Happy Valley Valley-Goose Bay in October. They planned to leave their boat there while they took a North American road trip on a motorcycle.

“We’ve lived continuously on the boat, more than 15 years right now,” said Harald. “But I

wanted to make a travel on bike ... because I want to see the big farms in the US. I don't have any interest in the big cities.”

Harald and Silvia were business owners in Germany before they began living on their boat 15 years ago. In order to make money during their journeys, Harald takes photographs and writes articles of the places he visits. He also has his own website, www.haraldpaul.com.

Harald and Silvia were anticipating an interesting, and inspiring road trip, where they planned to travel as far south as Florida.

But the Pauls ran into trouble when they tried to cross the US-Canada border in New Brunswick. According to Silvia and Harald, the US border officials declined their entry after six hours of questioning.

“The US didn't let us cross the border,” said Harald. “They find every reason to say ‘no’ — (our) unusual lifestyle, not owning our own property, whatever ...

“I told them ‘I'm a travel journalist I can't spend all my time in your office right now.’”

When they arrived back to Happy Valley-Goose Bay in November, the couple was expecting to be able to dock *Gypsy Life* for the winter. But they ran into some frustrating complications when they tried to make arrangements at the docks.

Eventually, it became too late to dock the boat, and *Gypsy Life* was surrounded by ice out in the water.

Despite the freezing cold winter temperatures, Silvia and Harald continued to live and sleep in *Gypsy Life*. Since they use the boat year-round, the vessel is well prepared for the winter months.

“You need to have a big boat or a prepared boat ... I have six heater systems inside and special insulation,” said Harald.

Each winter day meant hard work inside and outside the boat. Silvia and Harald used a chainsaw two or three times a day to cut the ice around *Gypsy Life*.

“It was a tough winter and a lot of work,” said Silvia. “There was so much work around the

boat, you don't get bored."

Fortunately, there were a number of locals who would drop by from time to time to visit and bring them food.

"Some people bring us moose; that's very good meat," said Silvia. "And we'd go to the grocery store and buy some food."

At the very least, the two had a constant companion on board. While visiting Nova Scotia in the fall, Silvia and Harald got a border terrier puppy named Walter.

Having a dog aboard the boat is also a required safety feature.

"I need a puppy to recognize the bears or whatever," said Harald. "I had two polar bear attacks on the boat (in Greenland).

"One destroyed my rubber boat ... that's why we are depending on a dog."

Now that the boat is freed from the ice and summer is quickly approaching, Harald and Silvia will soon be travelling again. They plan to continue travelling further north and even make a stop into Nain.

For Harald, it's also important to see new places so he can take pictures and write his stories.

"The biggest problem is I've lost six months income, because I'm a travel journalist," said Harald. "If I can not travel, I have no stories; if I have no stories I can not sell them."

The Pauls have no plans to settle down anytime soon. After 15 years on the water, it's hard for them to imagine living in a house again, or even on land for that matter.

"That is a lifestyle, I must say," said Silvia. "It's a different lifestyle and, when you have it in you, you do it all the time.

"Sometimes you miss your family of course; that's normal ... but that is the lifestyle."