

# THE HORNPIPE

VOLUME 29, NO. 12

DECEMBER 2005

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## Commodore's Comments

I've been thinking about the need to slow down. This time of year, we are all rushing about with our holiday shopping, holiday plans, holiday parties, and the rush to meet the numerous end-of-year deadlines. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to actually sit down and visit with friends over the holidays — if I can ever drag myself away from planning one more gift that requires one more trip to the store.

As sailors, we're more likely to understand the pleasures of slowing down. After all, we've chosen to see the world by water at what is roughly a walking pace. We have time to really look at things and really notice them. We can love a brisk sail, but my powerboat friends look at me oddly when I boast about making forty miles in a day. Along the way, though, we will have seen birds, cloud formations, and maybe been buzzed by a windsurfer — details that the go-fast people will never see.

I've also noticed the difference in slowing down to take in literature. I've become addicted to recorded books, which take much longer to

complete than sitting down to read. I've got a magic machine the size of a pack of chewing gum, and it holds at least forty hours of spoken words downloaded from my computer. I listen while driving or walking or doing routine chores that leave a lot of the brain unoccupied.

I've recently finished listening to *Sailing Alone Around the World* by Captain Joshua Slocum. I read this for the first time in high school and again in college. But listening to the book at the measured pace of a professional reader was a whole different experience. I was struck by the simple joy the captain took in the act of sailing his boat, following the wind and his fancy. He set out to go around the world to the east, but when he got to Gibraltar changed his mind and went around the other way. He made it through the Strait of Magellan into the Pacific and was blown back around the Horn and went through the Strait for a second time. He visited Fanny Stephenson in Tonga, spent months in Australia because he was having such a good time, and made a passage through the trade winds across the Indian Ocean where he didn't need to touch the wheel for several weeks at a time. Back in the home waters of the Caribbean, he learned of the Spanish-American War

but managed to make it safely home. He made the voyage because it was fun. The whole book is written in a good humored tone — the only cross words are directed at a goat that ate his chart of the West Indies. I think I was so struck by the good humor and simple pleasures because of the slow pace at which I went through it. I enjoyed the language at the speed it unfolded and wasn't so fixed on the goal of finishing the book.

This is an important lesson. We'll see if I can hold onto the joys of going slow as the year turns, January flows into February, and the interminable wait for sailing season that is March drags along. By then, of course, we'll all be looking to our new commodore, Duncan MacDonald, to deliver to us a mild and early spring, quick work in the boat yards for spring commissioning, and to another terrific season on the bay.

I'd like to thank all the members for their tremendous spirit and contributions pulling together our past terrific year. I hope to see you all soon!

Stay tuned for the time and whereabouts of our annual January party. We will let you know as soon as we know.

*Nan Shellabarger*

## **Blue Water Passage**

The following is my one and only blue water sailing experience. It has elements of the movies "Saps At Sea" and "The Perfect Storm", and thus may be interesting, appalling, or both to the membership.

In January of 1990, Herb Gillesby, a good friend and client, invited me to join him in sailing his Passport 40 from Bermuda to the Virgin Islands. Mats Danielson, a Swede, professional delivery skipper, and former member of the Swedish Army Special Forces, was the third member of the party. Parenthetically, I heartily endorse Mats' services to anyone who wants a boat moved long distances by an experienced pro. In addition, a fourth crew member (name unknown) was already waiting in St. George, Bermuda, for the three of us to fly in from Baltimore.

On arrival in Bermuda, we three taxied and ferried to the Dockyard, at the far end of the island

from St. George, where the boat was docked. After dropping our duffels on board, we taxied to a nearby small and rustic grocery store to provision. I expected that we would have detailed menus for each day, which would then be collated into a master shopping list of necessary items and quantities. Not so. We walked up and down the isles of the store with each sailor throwing into our shopping cart whatever caught his eye. I never found out if we bought too little or too much.

Next morning dawned clear, calm, bright, and cool. We called the weather station at the Bermuda airport and were advised that conditions were optimal for a passage south. We then spent three frustrating hours at the dock filling water tanks because the water service to the pier flowed at the slowest of trickles. While we were watering, the sky clouded over and the wind picked up. Away from the dock at last, we ran the length of Bermuda on an interior waterway to St. George, customs, and our fourth crew member. Even though we were the only boat seeking clearance, we cleared customs on Her Majesty's Royal Customs Officer's very leisurely schedule, particularly since we took him away from a card game; but as to the fourth sailor, no sign. I seem to remember something to the effect that he had met the love of his life in a St. George pub the night before and was in no physical or emotional condition to leave her bed. His decision proved wise. (How could it not?).

Facing seven to eight days of four hours on watch — eight hours off, we three put to sea at sundown. Wind out of the north at about 30 knots, not bad for our purposes. Since our course was due south, we ran before the wind and growing seas at a gratifying speed — both dead astern. After about three hours, the wind began to pipe up significantly. Because of the favorable weather forecast, we continued on course without sail change, making great progress toward our distant destination.

Only a little later, while I was below deck off watch, the boat sank her bow into a big wave or was hit by a rogue wave. This took all forward way off of her and threw me across the cabin down below. The sudden loss of speed instantly raised the apparent wind speed, causing the mainsail to explode into tiny shreds, which blew away ahead of us toward the Virgin Islands. The genoa fared

somewhat better, only tearing in half horizontally well up the luff. The gooseneck broke, leaving the boom free-swinging in the wind.

The damaged equipment was secured as well as possible, and I then focused on the conditions of the wind and sea. The wind was continuing to build and the seas were surprisingly high with tall white-capped waves that I could not measure in the dark. We were continuing to move at a good speed due south under bare pole (boom on the deck) with the wind astern. We turned on the diesel to maintain speed in the wave troughs and set one hour on — two hours off watches for the time being.

Through the night, the wind and seas continued to rise. On one of my earlier watches, a wave pooped the boat, filling the cockpit with water and dunking the helmsman (me) in water up to my armpits. As the night progressed, these dunkings were repeated and became frequent. The howling of the wind, crashing of the sea, waves over the stern, and violent motion of the boat, all in the darkness, were unnerving for the helmsmen and prevented the off-watch crew from getting much rest below.

The steel grey light of dawn showed whitecaps all over, spindrift blowing from wave crests, and waves that appeared a good bit higher than our masthead. The howling and crashing continued but were less unsettling in daylight than in the dark.

The ship's company assembled for a council of war. We decided to stay with one hour on – two hour off watches since we were all tired and anxious and longer watches at the wheel would have been extremely wearing. Mats checked the level of fuel in the tank (“You mean we didn’t check this before leaving Bermuda?”) and satisfied himself that we had enough fuel to run the diesel all the way to the Virgin Islands if necessary.

Our situation continued without change for two and a half days — little food, no sleep, no chance to dry off. Herb discovered a home remedy for his upset stomach. Every three hours, just before he went on watch, he gulped down a full tumbler of Seagrams Crown Royal. A few seconds later, his stomach would lodge a violent protest, emptying itself and filling the galley sink with

Crown Royal. Herb would let out a sigh and head on deck to take the wheel with his stomach, as he said, “settled.” This therapy lasted as long as the Crown Royal.

Not long after the last of the Crown Royal disappeared, the weather began to improve. The sun came out and the wind eased. Twenty-four hours later, we were enjoying the tropical conditions I had hoped for throughout the trip, calm seas and warm, gentle breezes. Mats fixed the auto pilot with some duct tape, and we no longer were slaves to the wheel. We started sleeping and opened the galley for business.

More than a full day ahead of schedule (due to the favorable if excessive winds and seas) we sighted the Virgins up ahead. Still tired, hungry, and emotionally spent, we landed at the Bitter End, where we promptly marched to a secluded, beachfront, self-serve bar at Birus Creek. There, we served ourselves long and liberally. Next day we berthed the boat at Tortola and caught the first flight home. It was at least two years before I set foot on a sailboat again.

*Lee Benedict*

### **Addendum to Summer Cruise**

We had a wonderful two weeks on the beautiful Chesapeake Bay this summer with our CCSC friends. It was not a sailing vacation, but definitely a social and sightseeing trip. We kept track of all the lighthouses we passed and thought you might like to hear about them.

- Seven Foot Knoll, Patapsco River — as you know the lighthouse is in the Inner Harbor and a “stick” has replaced it.
- Baltimore Light at the mouth of the Magothy River.
- Sandy Point Light
- Thomas Point Shoal Light, the best looking one around
- Cove Point, on land
- Drum Point Light, on a spider base, Patuxent River, north shore — the original is in Solomons at the museum (a great museum to visit, especially on a hot July day)

- Cedar Point, Patuxent River, south shore, again a stick in the water. (The original house disappeared a few years ago.)
- Point No Point
- Point Lookout, Potomac River, north shore
- Smith Point, Potomac River, south shore
- Great Wicomico River Light, on a spider base
- Tangier Island Light, saw this from a distance and can't remember what it looks like
- Jane's Island Light
- Solomons Lump, Kedges Strait
- Holland Island Bar Light, on a spider base
- Hooper Island Light
- Poplar Island Light
- Bloody Point Bar Light, entrance to Eastern Bay

That's quite a list. Did we forget any?

**Hank and Jan Zerhusen**

## **The Kids of Summer**

Hi folks!

We left the *Lauren A* in Indian Harbor Beach, Florida, on November 24 (turkey day) and headed north in a Hertz car. Hope you all had a great Thanksgiving. We had our turkey and trimmings at a Cracker Barrel in South Carolina.

We had a really nice and uneventful trip from Myrtle Beach (Little River), South Carolina, to Indian Harbor Beach. The weather for the most part was excellent. We only made one-night stops after leaving the boat at Hilton Head's Harbor Town Yacht Basin for a quick trip to Maryland for our great niece's wedding on November 11. We did choose to cross St. Andrew's Sound at a not so great time — the wind was from the North and blowing in the high 20s. In that sound, one has to go out rather far towards the Atlantic before turning back southwest to Cumberland Island, Georgia. St. Andrew's Sound is just south of Jekyll Island, where we stayed two nights waiting for the winds to calm down. We got beat up quite a bit, but thank goodness it was only for a relatively short time. We were taking the rollers (6-8 feet) on our port front quarter at times and were hit by one that

broached us pretty badly (almost knocked the microwave off its shelf).

Our other excitement was running aground in the Ft. George River. We've anchored there five times, but the tide was really low and there were several other boats in the anchorage when we arrived there at about 3:30 p.m. We were thankful that Hurricane Gamma decided to dissipate and not come to Florida. One prediction had it following the same path as Wilma, so we were a bit uptight about that.

The tidal range in South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida always amazes us (5-9 feet). Because of the full moon, the tides were exceptionally high and low. Anyway, we're back in Maryland and just made reservations to visit Ned, Ellen, and children in Louisville on December 10 for a few days and then also to visit Bill, Monika, and their two in Detroit after Louisville. We'll be back home from the December 19-26, when we will do our annual Williamsburg trip celebrating our 34th anniversary at the Williamsburg Inn in the same room we've had for 34 years; followed by a visit to Jud, Shawn, and their family in their new 100+ year-old house. Of course, we're looking forward to seeing Cindy, Bob, and family. We'll be spending Christmas Day together along with Laura, Philip, and crew in Pennsylvania, and with other relatives and friends here and in Virginia.

In case we don't get Christmas cards out again, we hope you all have a blessed Christmas and a happy, healthy NEW YEAR!

**Fondly, Art & Sue Grotz**

*THANKS TO ALL WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS AND PAST ISSUES OF THE HORNPIPE. WE HAVE FOUND THESE STORIES MOST ENTERTAINING. WITHOUT YOUR STORIES AND INFORMATIVE ARTICLES, HOWEVER, WE WILL HAVE VERY LITTLE TO REPORT IN OUR UPCOMING NEWSLETTERS; SO PLEASE KEEP SENDING IN YOUR ARTICLES.*