



Nautical Musings

by Captain Stan Glatzer

Why We Go To Sea

For everything we do in life there is supposed to be a reason, so I've been led to believe. For countless years people have asked each other, "Why did you do it? What made you do it?" Some classical responses have been "I don't know; I just felt like it; It felt good; I just wanted to see if I could." I have heard great adventurers, when queried, reply with the all time patented answer: "because it was there."

I have been sailing for thirty-plus years, and when I look back and try to formulate a response to the question, I inevitably have a montage of short scenarios flash through my mind. Scenes are re-lived of specific incidents, a particular few sunsets, storms I have survived and the varied emotions that are accompanied with recalling each event. There are snapshots in my mind that awe me with the spectacle of nature's offerings and the sensations I remember.

Voyagers and cruisers have written often of the splendors or beggarly conditions of foreign lands and the many faces of the inhabitants. Cultures are compared or left to stand on their own. These are some of the reasons we travel to exotic lands. What I seek to find is why we travel in small boats when seeking these adventures. Why not fly or take a cruise ship? What is it that pulls us to endure the trials and hazards we know we are going to be exposed to by choosing this mode of travel? The answer lies in the memories we have and exhilaration we experience when they are recalled.

My first recollection of sensing the sea voyage's subtle charms occurred in November of 1999 while standing the midnight to 2 a.m. watch aboard the 54-foot Little Harbor sloop *Solitaire*. I was serving as crew under Captain Lars Christensen, along with five others. We were on a delivery from Stamford, Connecticut to St. John, USVI, by way of Bermuda. The night was black. Coal black! The only light consisted of the compass binnacle and the billions of pinpoints of light in the sky. No differentiation could be discerned where the heavens ended and the sea began. I was afloat in a black hole right here on Earth.

Always desiring to immerse myself in the sense of being one with the ship and sea, I turned off the autopilot and steered by hand. Maintaining a course without staring at the compass required some knowledge of the winds' position (using a wind indicator gauge and the sensation of the wind on my left earlobe), the sound of the cadence beat as the vessel rose and fell to the ocean swell, and the rhythm of the helm's action as the boat angled up and down the wave. I needed a visual object to steer by since the above methods required too much concentration and would soon tire me. Tristan Jones' book entitled *A Star to Steer By* gave me the solution. The knowl-

edge that a star travels 15 degrees from east to west each hour allowed me to place a star just outside the windward spreader while steering 10 degrees east of my course and keep it there for 20 to 30 minutes. I would then select a star 10 degrees east of my course and repeat the time period. Plotting the course changes on the chart and verifying my position hourly with the SAT-NAV on board kept me alert and relaxed, and most of all, enabled me to be an active entity meshed with the ship, the sea and the world around me.

The feeling of insignificance one has when out on the vast expanse of ocean is humbling. The sense of accomplishment when one exerts oneself and doesn't need to rely totally on the mechanization of the surrounding world is breathtaking. Those two hours of standing watch converted me from a boater to a seafarer. The sea had hypnotized me, and I could not wait to become engulfed again in its spell: one reason I go to sea.

Nature's bounty continues at sea. The porpoise that play at the bow and surf the bow wave as the vessel glides through the water have been a sight that has delighted thousands of seafarers for centuries. I have been lucky enough to witness a scene worthy of a National Geographic or Discovery channel documentary. Sailing on a broad reach with the wind off our port quarter in a sea of 15-foot swells with a following sea, well spaced so as to provide a gentle merry-go-round style rise and fall to the boat, I was brought up sharp from my attention to steering by an object propelled out of the face of a wave about 20 feet from me. It was gone in an instant and the three of us in the cockpit just stared at each other in disbelief. A minute later another body hurtled, as if squeezed like a watermelon pit between someone's fingers, out of a wave face. Soon there were thirty to forty dolphins cannonading from the waves. The sight was awesome. More was yet to come. Each creature swam about seventy-five yards after emerging from the wave and then turned and swam toward the oncoming wave. Closing to within thirty-feet, the porpoise leaped to become airborne and slide effortlessly into the oncoming wave face, much like a salmon swimming against a waterfall, and disappear. We were provided with this spectacle for some twenty minutes when it ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Though some pictures were taken and have since been lost, the videotape in my memory will last for many years to come: another reason I go to sea.

Not all memories come from idyllic incidents oozing romanticism. There are those that come from occurrences fraught with anxiety, dread, fear and a strong and sudden surge of religiousness. An encounter with a force 10 storm off

the coast of Cape Hatteras, in the "grave yard of the Atlantic", is a prime example.

We were running out to sea under a partially furled genoa in a rising gale from a position 8-10 miles off shore while heading south on a delivery of a 44-foot Swan from Oyster Bay, New York to Charleston, South Carolina. The night was dark and the helmsman kept his eyes on the wind indicator, keeping it as close to the 5 o'clock position as possible. The Tai Chi exercises I had been practicing for twenty years enabled me to "root" myself to the cockpit sole and sense the waves' action on the vessel as they lifted her to a shuddering height at the wave top and then sent her plummeting down into the dark. I would feel the stern rise beneath me and wait with baited breath for the scary backside slide that would follow. I recall screaming into the night, shouting near the end of the downward slide, fearful of being pooped by the next wave, "LIFT! LIFT, G-D damn you!"

Steering was almost like conducting an orchestra. There was a definite rhythm to the wave train and the helm would require just so many spokes turned to the port and hold, followed by just so many turns to the starboard and hold. The change would have to be made when I sensed that second or two when the wave reached its summit and the vessel seemed to pause and at the bottom of the backside slide. Steering for 1/2 hour on and 1 hour off through the night and heaving to after being knocked down to the spreaders twice, we witnessed, at sunrise, a scene out of a movie - a cauldron of disoriented wave trains. The rhythm was gone. Waves of various sizes from 25 feet to 35 feet in height crashed to and fro with no visual pattern. Forty-foot-plus waves could be seen as waves crashed together and rose straight up as if a cannon ball had been dropped.

As frightening as the picture was, you could not cease to be awed by the fury and power of the sea. We rode the storm for 36 hours total, 13 running and 23 hours hove to, and arrived at a position 243 miles from the South Carolina coast. As the storm abated and the sky cleared to a blazing sun, we turned the vessel westward and headed toward Charleston. Laughing, partially from fear and partially from relief, we were highly animated by the experience and celebrated the passing of the storm. Thank G-D for German Frers, the designer of the 44-foot Swan.

Looking back at these adventures, I relive sights, sounds, physical and emotional sensations as though I am actually there. These and other recollections are filed in my memory and are the reasons "Why We Go to Sea."

Capt Stan