



# Nautical Musings

by Captain Stan Glatzer

## Knife? What knife?

The old adage "We learn from our mistakes" is not always true. The more intelligent person includes the addition of "and we learn from the mistakes of others." Unfortunately, many of us repeat the same mistakes over and over again. There is sometimes an occurrence that does not allow for another opportunity to use what we have learned from a mistake. It is when we make that one and only **fatal mistake**.

I write on this subject sooner than I would normally, having discussed some of the content not too long ago as a result of an article published in the New York Times on Sept 12, 2006: "A diver shot a large grouper with a spear on Saturday, but then drowned." It continues, "It looks like the fish wrapped the line to the spear around the victim's wrist. The fish went into a hole in the coral rock, effectively pinning the man to the ocean bottom."

The importance of the advice that I give to students to carry a knife dedicated to emergency use only and located in a manner that allows you to retrieve it with either hand in the event of an injury to one hand, will be further emphasized by the retelling of the events that follow.

An Alaskan commercial fishing vessel was foundering and it was evident that it would succumb to the onslaught of the forty-foot waves and the fifty-knot-plus storm winds. The crew was preparing to abandon ship and one crewman launched the dory over the side. Unfortunately, the painter was not secured to a cleat on board the mother ship and the dory floated away. Panic-stricken, the same crewman dove into the savage seas and with the dory, disappeared in the waves.

The two remaining crew launched the inflatable life raft after securing the painter to the deck. Carefully boarding the raft, they prepared to cast off when one of the two exclaimed that the painter was tangled in the fishing vessel's rigging. He asked the other mate for a knife to sever the line so that they could break free of the sinking vessel.

The answer was, "I don't have one either."

What do two seamen do to cut a half-inch thick nylon line to prevent them from being dragged down with the mother ship to a watery demise? They did the only thing they could do - use what Mother Nature gave them for cutting their food. They proceeded to chew their way through the half-inch nylon line.

Taking turns and chewing until their gums were bleeding, the process lasted just over an hour in time. With a heavy surge straining it, caused by a wave lifting the raft, the line finally snapped. The mother ship sank seven minutes later. Luckily for the two crewmen, they were not wearing dentures. We hope they learned from their mistake.

A scenario I described in an earlier article exemplifies the severity of having the knife and not properly assessing the situation before using it. Delivering his brand new forty-foot-plus sloop on a voyage from Montauk to Bermuda, an experienced Skipper and one crewman, along with two passengers, encountered a situation. The anchor had broken free from its place on the bow and was dragging in the water at the water line of the boat. The Skipper realized that a thirty-five pound anchor swinging violently against the hull could hole his ship and sink it. He darted forward and attempted to retrieve the anchor on deck. Concentrating on the anchor line that was over the side, the Skipper carelessly became entangled in the line he had retrieved and had thrown on deck. A wave caused him to lose his grip on the rode, and the anchor fell back into the sea with the loose lines seizing one his legs, dragging him down with it.

Not having a knife with him, the Skipper called to the crewman to grab the sheath knife that was secured to the base of the mast and cut him free. Obeying the plea, the crewman rushed forward with the knife and cut the first piece of line he reached. Unfortunately, the line was what held the man and anchor to the boat. The cut should have

been made below the Skipper's leg. The Skipper and the anchor disappeared into the sea. Had the Skipper carried a properly placed knife, the story never would have been told.

On a personal note, I relate the incident that took place while I was spear fishing with a Hawaiian Sling and snorkel in Reynold's Channel, between Atlantic Beach and Far Rockaway. I was hunting for striped bass that had begun to appear off Long Island's southern shore.

After some two hours of unsuccessful quest, I headed back toward my landing when a 30-35 pound bass almost brushed against me. Spinning, I released the spear from the sling and struck the fish just behind the left gill. The 12 feet of line stretched taut, and the fish headed for the bottom, a depth of forty-plus feet.

The line which I had looped around my left wrist extended my arm out in front of me as I was taken on an underwater version of a Nantucket Sleigh Ride, as was experienced by whalers when they were towed along by a harpooned whale. I was no match for the thirty-five pounds of pure muscle that whisked me through the water faster than I had ever swum in competition on my college swim team. It was both exhilarating and fearsome as I reached the limit of holding my breath.

The line was cutting into my wrist, and I had to release myself from the very thing I had come to hunt. I had been successful, but the price for doing so was becoming too expensive. My life was on the line. The need for a knife to sever the line was dire. With my left hand reaching and immobilized out in front of me, I had to reach for my knife with my right.

My chest was pounding and my temples throbbed as though they were about to burst. Reaching down to my right lower leg, I retrieved my knife from the sheath strapped to my leg, and drawing the blade, I severed the line that reversed the roles between hunter and captive. I broke the surface just as I was about to inhale water. The air rushed into my lungs and I lay on the surface gasping for breath.

The dive taught me to keep the tether to the spear secured to my belt with a quick-release knot. Thank G-D I was instructed to keep a knife where I would be able to retrieve it with either hand. Had the diver in the opening story done likewise, he would not have made that one **fatal mistake**.



## Mariner's Marina and Yacht Sales

(609)698-1222 • 475 East Bay Avenue • Barnegat, NJ • Fax: (609)698-1469

OPEN: MON. - FRI. 9AM - 5PM • SAT. 9AM - 5PM • SUN. CLOSED

*We are not just a trailer store, we are a Full Service Marina, on-the-water equipped to haul, powerwash & fit boats properly with a new trailer.*

\*Cash or Check Only!



**"WHOLESALE TO THE PUBLIC"**



- We cannot be undersold on any LOADRITE trailers...
- Trailers are complete with Standard Factory Equipment...
- All trailers with TPR Non Scuff Rollers...
- Don't be fooled. All prices are 100% guaranteed\*



**Largest Stock of Trailers In New Jersey...Call For Pricing**