

THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME...A TRIP DOWN THE ICW FROM CANADA TO FLORIDA - PART II

by Gordon Butler

As the day dawned bright and blue, I resumed the routine of making my morning engine room checks once again as we prepared to get *Joy IV* out of our nice little marina next to Great Kills Yacht Club in that little inlet on the south side of Staten Island. In the city we'd had all the New York experience we were going to have for awhile and, moreover, I think we were anxious to get started again. After all, we'd had the hard part – the locks and the little boats that we carefully threaded our way around; we'd had the bridge tender who closed the bridge while we were going through it. We'd had dockmasters who thought their harbors were a little deeper than they were, but it all goes with the trip, the experience of a trip on America's Atlantic Intra-coastal Waterway.

And we had Joe and Sam with us – Joe, the English foxhound and Sammy, the newly-handicapped yellow Labrador. It's comfortable to say that Sammy was getting used to his missing foreleg. The two dogs were our constant loyal companions and ready for anything.

The irrepressible Sammy would react to a question enthusiastically, as though his mission in life were to be joyful and wholehearted about everything. On the boat he'd find a comfortable place to crash where he could see and take an active part in anything. He'd recovered and survived the massive doses of antibiotics he'd been given in veterinary attempts to achieve any nerve restoration after his car accident. It turned out he'd suffered the injury that would change his mobility for rest of his life, but a missing foreleg did not change his uncontrollable urge to swim in anything with enough water in it that even resembled a pond and a joie de vivre that made him the center of attention anywhere he went.

Meanwhile, Joe was just Joe. He'd sleep in front of my chair on the flybridge for the whole trip and was the handsomest devil you ever saw. He had the coloring of a Pinto pony – tan with a white saddle. If there was some action – any action - he'd flash alert and assume his "coolest" demeanor: one eyebrow cocked and ears standing fully alert for a just moment. Then, if whatever woke him up was really exciting, he'd roll his eyes and look like some fabled mountain dog.

We took off into Raritan Bay through the Great Kills Harbor entrance and out past the ubiquitous "spark plug," the great day beacon that boaters of every shape and size use. Then, just past the marker, as we neared the middle of the bay, there was a buzz as the propellers hit something and crunched! The only way the noise could be described was a "buzz."

"ZZZZxxxxtttt!" It was just about that long. Instantly, my eyes took in the engine gauges! No oil pressure problems, nothing out of the ordinary! There was no loss of speed, no overheating, nothing.

We'd remember that noise later.

In the meantime we pushed on down the New Jersey coast to the fabled shore. The Ferris wheel at Asbury Park came and went, along with the remainder of the towns toward Cape May. It was a beautiful, pretty Chamber-of-Commerce day with gorgeous, cloudless blue skies. One incident stands out that day as *Joy IV* was pulling into Manasquan Inlet past the great hotels and boardwalk at Atlantic City. We were headed for Senator Frank S. Farley State Marina in the heart of Atlantic City.

A big Sea Ray followed us into the inlet at full plow, bow high in the air. It was apparent that if the guy running that boat could see us, he would need x-ray vision because he'd have to be able to see us through the bottom of his boat! We pushed on at flank speed – 10 knots! I thought the Sea Ray was coming on fast, but we both pulled into the marina together without incident. The guy acknowledged me by saying, "Gee, I didn't even see you there!"

"Good thing I was going fast enough!" I responded. Ten knots was a great turn of speed for *Joy IV*!

Check-in and fueling were normal, and I have to say we probably helped Mr. Trump pay some of the interest carrying charges on that beautiful piece of real estate adjacent to the marina. Marina guests register like guests of the hotel and enjoy all the hotel guest privileges. It's a very classy place. Noisy casino, but it's a great waypoint on a trip from New York to Cape May. One hilarious note, though, was the single unaccompanied matrons in the buffet

check-in line. They'd all queue up for the big (free) meals armed with hotel pillowcases so they could carry their dinner and breakfast goodies home on the bus from the buffet. You sure see some interesting people when they're gambling and there's free food!

So we joined all the revellers after dinner and spent the night gambling and having fun, secure in the knowledge that our two intrepid, valiant guards were keeping watch over everything. Sammy and Joe were on the job! Sammy was alert and wagging his tail to welcome any and all visitors while Joe snored, lost in his dreams in the arms of Morpheus!

We survived Atlantic City and its siren casinos, and the next day bright and early we started up again after breakfast with full fuel tanks, and our destination was Cape May. Another brilliant day was in the offing as The Magnificent Adventure continued.

About halfway to our destination, the port engine just stopped pulling its weight, and *Joy IV* veered to port as the starboard engine and transmission kept chugging along. I compensated with the steering because the water was relatively calm. The boat wouldn't go into gear on the port side at all. My partner steered while I went to the engine room and found all the fluid drained from the transmission, so I just shut down the port side and ran on the starboard only. I cleaned up the mess as well as I could and went back to the bridge to call ahead to a marina in Cape May. The Coast Guard people were cooperative, and although the maneuver called for a tight right turn, we were able to handle everything and make our negotiations with the marina there. The situation was unfortunate because Johnson & Towers, the famous engine builder, is located nearby, and it would have been marvelous if we'd had GM or Detroit engines. Ours were Perkins, though, and these two London bus engines had never let us down, so the problem was likely the port transmission, and that's exactly what it turned out to be.

Several thousands dollars and eight days later, we lit off the engines again and headed out the Cape May Canal and didn't even make it to the end! An incompetent mechanic who was more concerned with ordering parts from Seattle rather than south Florida, and who wouldn't let me near his shop, had done the re-and-re job, eventually necessitating a complete rebuild of that Velvet Drive again after we ultimately got to our destination in Melbourne, Florida. The situation almost made me wish that I'd repowered with those 6V-92s I'd been quoted on. Interesting, though. The rebuild has held together until this day – fourteen years later!

We licked our wounds and carried on. The thousands I might have spent by dealing with the charlatan in the marina were saved in the end because I made the final repair myself about six months later in Florida. I ended up showing my scars to Lewis Rivers, a local marine mechanic in Melbourne and asked him if I could use a little space in his shop to rebuild a transmission. If anyone was going to screw up a job this time, it would be yours truly!

But, through the experience at Cape May and herculean amounts of crab in all its forms, it turned out that we explored – and enjoyed - the Jersey Shore and the town while *Joy IV* recovered in the shop. We'd end up with more lore than we needed from the area!

Through the canal and across Delaware Bay to the C&D Canal we went, with scenery and experience oozing out of the whole area. We stayed at



Cape May, NJ



Senator Frank S. Farley
State Marina,
Atlantic City, NJ

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