

Terror of the Dock

by Kerri Glynn

These days Tim, my husband, seems to take a kind of demented joy in horsing *Egraine* around in tight quarters. *Egraine* is a 46-foot, 30,000 lb. sailboat with a 57 hp single screw auxiliary and no bow thruster. Tim is confident docking and undocking in almost any conditions with me as his dockhand. I, on the other hand, live in mortal fear and dread of these encounters, suffering sometimes days in advance. I dream of bow thrusters and even more of well-protected marinas with uniformed attendants. I would rather stay on a mooring or drop the hook than face the terrors of the dock.

We learned big boats in the Virgin Islands, where moorings are plentiful, winds are strong and many of the marinas are quite exposed. Many charterers and owners leave the business of getting the boat in and out of a slip to the locals, who have had lots of practice. From the beginning, my captain could not leave well enough alone. He inveigled our inestimable boat minder, H. Chris Felicien, to teach him to ease our Gulfstar 44 into a slip in a 25-knot wind.

Tim was driven by the macho conviction that to be a complete boater he had to dock and undock like the pros. Despite his determination, he was more than a little anxious about it in the early going. His stress communicated itself to me and with our finely tuned resonance, magnified itself. He seems to be over it completely, but I am not. We had a few close calls when I was needed to fend off other vessels and not a few pilings. The feeling of responsibility was awesome.

My worst memory is the docking that followed a trip from Newport. Let me begin by saying that on the eight-hour trip we never sighted another vessel. They were smart enough to stay at home; we were

not. As we pulled into our harbor, several old codgers saw us from their bar stools at a local restaurant and literally ran down the street to offer help in catching lines.

Well, too late. As Tim sped toward our slip in an attempt to avoid the 40-knot crosswinds, my job was to jump – no, step – off the boat and attach the spring line to the cleat. This would stop the forward motion of the boat – if I did it in time. I landed without falling, but failed to snub the line on my first attempt. My second attempt was a success, but *Egraine* still rammed into the dock. That's when you think it might have been better to have a white boat – not a dark blue one.

But since we do have to come into a slip sometimes, let me share the lessons I've learned. If you're pulling into an unfamiliar slip, be sure to call ahead and ask on which side you need to set up your fenders and dock lines. Also, it isn't a bad idea to ask for a little assistance in catching the lines. Now, Tim hates to do this because he thinks it makes him look like a wimp. Prevail – beg if you must. Even if you do ask, it's usually a fifty-fifty proposition if the helper actually shows up when you need him, so you'd better get ready to do it alone. You need three lines: a bow, a stern, and the all-important spring line set amidships. We never have forgotten to make sure the line is actually attached to a cleat, but many sailors have. After you've checked that, pull the remainder of the line under the lifelines so it won't get caught when you toss it. Now Tim actually makes two coils, one to hold and one to throw. This is a great idea.

It's also a great idea to practice in advance. If you're as bad an athlete as I am, you'll spend a lot of time either throwing the line way off course so that the catcher has to dive for it or you smack him in the face.

We have had many practice sessions on board – I throw and Tim catches. I'm not much better at it, but steadily improving. I'm much better at pulling up the dinghy. This is important because you can't drive around a marina while towing it on 30 feet of line. Imagine it wrapping itself around a piling or another boat.

So, we've practiced, the lines and fenders are set, and the dinghy line is short. I'm as ready as I can be. Before the panic sets in, it's important to find out exactly what's expected of you. Ask questions – hypothetical ones as well. When your captain is trying to maneuver a 14-foot-wide boat into a 16-foot-wide slip, he won't be as receptive to your questions. If you've left your spring line on a piling, it's a good idea to ask the marina to ask someone to check that it's still there. Last month Tim pulled into our slip and the crew reached to retrieve it from the piling and guess what? It wasn't there. It was tied to the bow line of the boat next door. I won't repeat the words my captain used as he demanded that the captain of that vessel untie it and throw it to him – NOW! Well, he did and we didn't ram into yet another dock. Luckily, that was a guy's trip and not my problem to face.

Perhaps the most important thing is to listen to your captain's instructions and not those of the helpful people on the dock. That's why Tim sometimes doesn't like to have help – everyone has his own ideas about how to tie up, but the captain is the one who knows his boat and knows best what you need to do.

In the long run, all you need is confidence and a Xanax, or a "Painkiller," a Caribbean concoction of orange juice, pineapple juice, crème de coco and liberal quantities of Pusser's rum. You think I'm kidding? Not really.

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