



31st  
Annual

# Around Long Island Regatta

by Joseph A. Flahive

Contributing writer Joseph A. Flahive, Glen Cove resident and avid sailor, wrote to us recently to report on one of his favorite sailing events, the annual Around Long Island Regatta, this year sponsored by the Sea Cliff Yacht Club on July 26.

Weather. Sailors' weather was the big "if" overriding the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Around Long Island Regatta involving some 70 boats that will sail 190 miles from Rockaway Point to the event's sponsor's site, Sea Cliff Yacht Club in Hempstead Harbor.

The late Frank Braynard, founder of Tall Ships events, launched the regatta 31 years ago. He never wished for the early July to early August Sirius Dog Days when winds vanish, Long Island Sound becomes flat as a lake, and oppressive, sultry air puts Poseidon to sleep and tests the patience and ingenuity of the best skippers and crews.

Early, at 6:30 a.m. on Thursday, we were aboard our *Precious Metal III*, a 43-foot Beneteau, leaving Sea Cliff with a crew of seven. Our skipper was my son, Bill Flahive. The weather was morning-bright with golden touches on mast tips, a deep blue sound, a light blue cloudless sky with a five- to eight-knot wind. The two miles or less predicted visibility showed patchy fog.

Under power, we passed LaGuardia Airport, entered Hell Gate at flood current inbound, avoided north and south tug and barge traffic and Homeland Security power vessels, and rocked to the eddies and pockets of strong, swirling whirlpools that resembled elongated figure eights. Leaving the East River, we entered the Upper Bay, choosing Buttermilk Channel, turned into the center section, and passed through the two-mile Narrows and under the Verrazano Bridge to meet the Atlantic's calm, light swells.

We didn't enjoy the best welcome, when within minutes a low, glaring-bright fog enveloped us, leaving a shrinking then expanding 200-yard peering radius. We searched for the outbound G-19 gong to enter the seven-mile-long Ambrose, found it and shortly, at G-9, turned to 130 degrees. Our radar sweeps were anxiously scrutinized for any sign of close, incoming/outgoing oilers, freighters or fishing vessels in the channel, while also maintaining heightened listening for horns and engines.

From G-1 to south and east of Rockaway Point at 11:30 a.m., we were early for a 1 p.m. start and were somewhat surprised that no other competitors were in sight since



the fog had started to lift. We wondered if we had miscalculated our position, but after criss-crossing the designated area a few times, we spotted the Naval Academy's white-hulled, 66-foot *Zaraffa* and then the Merchant Marine Academy's maroon-hulled, 77-foot *Alchemy*, the only boat with a canting keel and water ballast, which won last year's ALIR in a record-breaking 18 hours. Shortly, more boats made their way into the starting area. They ID'd the Committee boat, surveyed wind shifts, lay line distances and timing. At the 1 p.m. start, we had an 8- to 10-knot southwest wind and clearing skies. Divisions, set to cross the line at 10-minute intervals, headed for Montauk Lighthouse.

Our course was set to parallel the south shore. Moving at four to six knots, we watched sunset about 8 p.m. as we passed the Fire Island Lighthouse and the first watch took the helm. On Friday morning, there was a light wind, off Shinnecock a few boats were in sight. As the sun rose higher, the wind began to decrease. From noon until about 5 p.m., we were trimming sails and scanning for wind patches to aid our creeping headway. Finally, with light puffs and a favorable current, we rounded Montauk. It had taken about 29 hours to cover 90 miles.

It was 16 miles to Plum Gut's middle marker; fortunately the wind picked up 10 knots and the flood was inbound. As the sun set, we were in the sound on a 250-degree heading and very pleased that

we'd made the Gut before flood reversal. Within a few hours after sunrise, we were anything but pleased off Northport, under a blazing hot, sultry, 90-degree-plus sun. It was windless with not a ripple along the waterline. We sat dead in the water as the humidity kept applying a sheen of sweat to all of us. What to do?

Our skipper had the answer. He decided to relieve the monotony and revive listless spirits by having the cockpit loudspeakers blare forth Wagner's Valkyries, the loudest Offenbach he could find, a current Leonard Bernstein, and then top that off with a rousing Sousa finale! After numerous quips, almost all of us jumped overboard for a

swim to cool off. Our only bearing or reference points from mid-sound to about three miles distant were the four very tall white, red-banded stacks of the Northport utility plant near shore. They didn't move, we didn't move - an irksome silent stand-off.

We experienced an odd sighting west of us, not too distant, but hard to make out through the haze. We guessed it to be blackish logs or seals moving from the Connecticut shoreline south toward Northport. As we drifted closer, we found ourselves in the middle of a growing number of kayakers skimming light swells across the sound. We gave up counting how many when we'd reached 300. A broadband, an endless flotilla of orange, black, white, red, yellow single and double kayakers, paddles flashing, soon surrounded our boat. Those closest asked us to be careful not to collide with them. We found this to be amusing inasmuch as our light green gennaker drooped from the 48-foot masthead to over the rail and virtually into the water. In reply to our questions, we learned that the group was carrying out an annual kayakers fundraising event. I suppose our meeting could have been described as Gulliver and the "kayakputians."

About 4 p.m., the wind came to life and we started heading for Hempstead Harbor and the finish line. We finished on Saturday at 7:45 p.m. It had taken about 53 hours to finish fourth in our division. First place was taken by *Alchemy* and second by *Zaraffa*, so the military academies did well.

As a footnote, Bill Flahive, wife Helena, Billy and Emma were invited aboard *Zaraffa* for a Sunday morning sail. They became acting skippers at the helm for a few hours. They said that it would be a lifelong memory. The Academy's invitation was in partial thanks for Bill's loaning his boat a few months ago to the Academy for racing."

