

# Semper Paratus

by Hank Foglino

Francis Dowling felt a touch of guilt as he enjoyed being with his family, his wife Jackie and two boys, Chris and Sean, aboard his boat *Wet Seal*. It was Memorial Day and as a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary he felt that perhaps he should have volunteered to go on a safety patrol that day. The Auxiliary is the civilian arm of the United States Coast Guard and assists in many ways, including volunteering their vessels and time to patrol the marine environment maintaining vigilance re: the safety of the boating public and Homeland Security concerns. However, it was great to just relax on board with his family. They were anchored off Short Beach in Smithtown and had just finished lunch when the wind began to increase from the south. They decided to move to their mooring in the Nissequogue River, just east of the launching ramps at Kings Park.

At about 1335 (1:35pm) Francis spied a life jacket drifting by and saw that a canoe with two occupants had capsized about 50 feet from his vessel. Telling Jackie to alert the Coast Guard, Francis and Chris launched the eight-foot inflatable and made for the occupants. Jackie contacted the Coast Guard and spoke to Mike Heiberger, an auxiliariast, who was maintaining radio watch on that date. Notifying the Officer of the Day, he was told to alert the Auxiliary vessel that was on patrol that date, which happened to be Phil Milani on his vessel *4 Me 2*, to proceed to the incident area.

The tide was low at 1025 that date and was at flood tide when the incident occurred. That and the fact that the wind was still blowing at about 20 knots made it somewhat difficult to get the canoeists into the Zodiac. However, they were young men and were able to help Francis and Chris in getting them aboard. When boarded they were taken to the launching ramp wet, but none the worse for wear, and very thankful for getting out of the water, which was a chilly 62°F that day.

Francis and Chris had hardly gotten back to the boat, when at 1357 a second canoe overturned, dump-



ing a young man and woman into the river. The Coast Guard was again alerted and, in turn, contacted Phil Milani and asked him to try to get to the scene as soon as possible. In fact he was already approaching the mouth of the river. Francis and Chris boarded the Zodiac again and made for the overturned canoe and its occupants. This time it was a lot more difficult. The couple was not as experienced as the former pair and the young lady was panicking trying to hold on to the canoe and trying to put on her life jacket at the same time. After much splashing and quasi hysteria they were finally boarded and taken to *Wet Seal*. Phil and his crewman, Ken Gustafson, arrived at the scene when they were being boarded via the swim platform and came alongside on the starboard quarter. Both canoeists were "freezing" and visibly shaken, especially the young lady. They were wrapped in blankets and eventually warmed up and calmed down with no visible signs of injury. When feeling up to it, they were taken ashore by Phil. After thanking their benefactors the young lady was heard to mumble, "That's enough canoeing for me today."

It must be noted, rather sadly, that *none* of the canoeists was wearing a life jacket when they capsized. I can describe that only as "dumb".

In summation, thanks to the presence of four Auxiliariasts, Francis and his family by chance, Phil, Ken and Mike, by design, what could have been a couple of tragic events turned out to be only an uncomfortable inconvenience, and hopefully, a learning experience.

## DUMB

Division 22 of the Auxiliary, via a grant from BOATUS, has mounted signs at various boat launching sites, including, Oyster Bay, Huntington, Northport and Port Jefferson urging people to wear their life

preservers. Current statistics indicate that the number of fatalities is decreasing in recreational boating as a whole, but increasing at an alarming rate among the growing canoe and kayak population. In an effort to make the public aware of the factors that lead to safe boating when using a canoe and/or a kayak, the Coast Guard Auxiliary is teaching a Paddle Smart seminar course designed by the American Canoe Association. Contact your local flotilla for more information.

The Auxiliary is also conducting voluntary Vessel Examinations for canoes and/or kayaks to verify that the owners have all the necessary safety equipment on board and to answer any questions re: the safe operation of the vessel. If the equipment is in place, a decal will be issued indicating that the vessel has met all the requirements. This is a voluntary endeavor and no information will be exchanged beyond the vessel owner and the auxiliariast doing the inspection. Remember, as the title says, "**Always Be Prepared**" to get yourself and the less informed home safely after a day on the water.

**Editor's Note:** *Semper Paratus* is Latin and translates to Always Ready. It is the official motto of the United States Coast Guard. Some people translate the phrase as Always Prepared, which is synonymous.





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