

Sailing With the Partner: Why One Should Never Publish Anything, Ever

by Evan Loeffler

Recently I wrote a story about an ill-fated whitewater rafting trip. The story—which I did not exaggerate one bit— attracted the attention of one of the partners at my firm. He called me into his office, complimented me on my article, and then stated that since I had such a plethora of nautical experience, that I could help him sail his boat from Friday Harbor to Seattle.

The fact is that I do know how to sail. My father is an avid sailor and, despite my protests that I hated it, took great pains to teach me. Many hours of my youth were spent on a sailboat engaged in typical sailing activities like knotting, splicing, bailing, retching, and being in a pure state of terror. Sailing is one of the reasons I moved as far away from Boston as possible.

Still, the chance to suck up to a partner is not to be dismissed lightly or for reasons of personal safety. So, smiling bravely, I agreed to help crew the boat.

"It'll be great," said the partner as we drove north to catch the ferry to Friday Harbor. "Just you and me against the elements!"

"What about the boat?" I asked.

"Oh, that too."

"And what's this 'you and me' business? I thought you said there were two other people."

"They couldn't make it," the partner explained.

We made our way to the partner's boat, a 27-foot vessel that appeared well battered from many voyages. As the partner stowed our gear I checked the lifeboat to see if it floated. It did not.

"What's wrong with your lifeboat?" I asked.

"What lifeboat?" asked the partner.

I pointed to the water. "The one that is currently at the bottom of the harbor!" I asked pointedly.

"Oh that," said the partner, looking at the submerged dinghy 20 feet underwater. "It looks like some idiot put it in the water without putting the drain plug in."

"Oh," I said.

"These things float so much better without holes in them."

"You don't say."

One of the many problems with sailing is the wind. Wind is a necessary part of sailing because it makes the boat move. Unfortunately, there are harmful side effects to this mode of locomotion. In addition to making the boat move, wind makes waves. Waves make the boat move as well, but not in the same fashion. Waves cause the boat to move up and down, and to rock back and forth, frequently all at the same time. If the wind is strong enough, waves have a nasty tendency to become larger than the boat. These waves are notoriously impolite, and frequently do not content

themselves with passing under the boat, but instead attempt to move through it, making everything in it or on it very wet.

To a seasoned sailor, there are over 30 types of wind ranging from air to zephyr with less gentle versions like hurricane, typhoon and tornado. To the uninitiated, there are only two types of wind: too much and too little.

The partner and I began our trip with exactly no wind at all. I suggested drinking beer at the harbor pub as a way of passing the time, but the partner wanted to get going. He handed me an oar and began beating time with some drums while I rowed. When we got a mile or so out of the harbor, he showed mercy and started up the outboard motor.

The next few hours were uneventful. We watched the scenery go by at approximately one mile every other hour, drank beer, and watched the clouds turn from gray to black.

"I believe we may be in for a storm," said the partner.

He was right. The wind picked up from none whatsoever to *waaaay* too much. We responded in typical macho sailor fashion by cutting the engine, raising our sails and drinking beer. The clouds then released their cargo of rain on us, making it difficult to determine where the ocean ended and the rain began. We responded again by putting on our foul-weather gear (which are just adult-sized yellow slickers), and drinking more beer.

I believe I may have mentioned that waves are an unfortunate side-effect of wind on the water. Waves, as I said, make the boat move in directions that are not contemplated by its occupants. I remembered at this point that one of the reasons I did not like sailing is that while I can hang onto something to keep from being tossed around, or from, the boat in heavy weather, my stomach does not always move as quickly as the rest of my body. Stomachs treated in this fashion tend to empty themselves of their own accord.

A large wave altered its course and attacked our boat. It threw us into the air and whacked us like a tennis serve. At this point, my stomach announced it no longer had room to hold the beer I had been storing there. Realizing that I was not going to be needing it myself, I stationed myself at the stern of the boat and began the seagoing ritual of propitiating the sea gods by offering them my beer. Sea gods are usually not particular about beer, and do not care if it is partially digested. This time, however, the squall did not abate.

"You call this a storm?" he yelled. "I've seen bigger waves in my toilet!"

I made a mental note never to use the bathroom at the partner's house. I was fairly certain that he had lost his mind, but decided that this was not a good time to suggest that his leisure time might be better spent than playing with the water in his toilet bowl.

There are a few rules about sailing that must be explained to adequately describe the remainder of the trip. One person must always be steering the boat to keep it from tipping over or from similar unpleasantness. As the owner of the boat, the partner took this job. Thus, he spent the remainder of the storm with his back to the wind, holding his course, and keeping up a stream of encouraging invective at me on how to keep the boat from sinking. I jumped around the boat dealing with various emergencies. Sails needed to be alternately raised and lowered; knots required untangling; and more beer needed to be offered back to the sea. My foul-weather gear was, by this, time, doing a marvelous job of keeping water in instead of out. I feared that I might become the first person to drown inside of his raincoat.

Hours later, the storm having died down, we reached our destination. As we entered the Seattle harbor, the partner had already started spin-doctoring the experience.

"Quite trip, huh?" he said. "I haven't had such a great sail for years. I'll be sailing the boat back in about six months. Can I count on you to help crew the boat again?"

"I plan to be violently ill in about six months," I said.

"Great! I've been looking for a regular crewman," said the partner.

The thought of spending another weekend on that boat made want to gnaw off my right arm. I briefly considered leaping over the side and swimming to shore, but then the partner added the words that never fail to provide incentive to an associate.

"I'll bring the beer," he said.

"Count me in."