

YOU LOSE SOME, ONLY TO WIN SOME

FROM WET, FOG-BOUND MAINE TO CRISP COWICHAN BAY, B.C.

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Rain, fog, surf and big tides

I was huddled in my tiny 2-person Eureka tent on a rock-pile-like island, off Cape Split, way downeast along the coast of Maine. It was raining in buckets, 5 inches that night alone. I was awash in my tent, riding my fully inflated Thermo Rest air mattress like a surfboard. All my gear was in waterproof bags, and I had my aluminum survival blanket tightly wrapped around me in my sleeping bag. There was thunder and lightning, and the surf was pounding the bold shore and outlying ledges. I had put in my earplugs, in hopes to catch some sleep, but it just did not happen.

What was I doing here, I thought to myself? This was supposed to be a leisurely, late July, solo fun-paddle along Maine's most easterly shores and bays, a true "Downeaster". I had planned to start just east of the notorious Petit Manan Bar, a tad to the east of the touristy Mount Desert Island area, like in Milbridge, dip down that first bay, and eventually end up along Maine's true "Bold Coast" beyond Cutler to Lubec, on the Canadian border.

Start of trip

That sounded great, after rounding the five big Penobscot Bay islands the two previous summers. I had tried to start this trip 3 days earlier with my car-shuttle driver Nancy (thank-you, thank-you!), but we thought better of it and turned around after 30 miles of driving. The weather (torrential rain and dense fog) was just too bad for a successful launch and first day on the water.

The next day, at least the rain had stopped, but you could cut the fog with a knife. That's OK by me, though; I like to be challenged in my old-fashioned dead reckoning navigation. So we drove the 70 miles to Milbridge, and I was out of sight in no time – so was Nancy, along with the entire shoreline. Since I had lost one day due to "inclement weather", as the weather report put it, I shortcut my course, cutting out going around Bois Bubert Island, and decided to go straight to Marsh Island in Pleasant Bay (Mash Island on the nautical chart). I had phoned ahead for permission to camp on this private island, associated with the Maine Island Trail. It turned out I was the first person to camp here this year on this delightful little island.

All worked out fine, and even the next day, down Pleasant Bay to Cape Split and up into the western corner of Moosabec Reach, and out to Stevens Island. The MITA campsite was to the right in a small cove. There also was a fine sheltered gravel beach for take-out, but it necessitated some portage of my gear and boat. But arriving at high tide would be much easier than at low tide, like right now. A seaweed-covered boulder field extended way out to sea. It looked like a very arduous portage to the last patch of gravelly beach, where I could finally load my boat and push off in the morning.

I was cold, wet, tired and could not find my usual energy boost to start the new day. I checked and rechecked the NOAA weather reports – no, it did not look good at all! What was I doing here? It kept raining, 12 hours by now. Time passed in utter wetness, and it became afternoon, and I was still huddled in my sleeping bag. So I finally roused myself, pulled myself together, mustered some resolve – yes, all three were necessary, to call Nancy and discuss my options. She had stayed for a

couple of extra days in our Corea summer cottage with the family. I asked her point blank, whether she could pick me up at about 11:00 a.m. tomorrow morning at the public ramp in Jonesport. I should be able to make it there, come hell or high water.

I was done! My trip was over! I was bailing out! A first in all my many ocean canoe trips. The fun was suddenly gone out of this trip. I had done this stretch several times before, so I did not have to prove to myself that I could do it. I suddenly did not want to endure this nasty weather any more, nor the strong, extreme tides and long portages over the extensive inter-tidal zone. Three nights on the trail were already more than enough, in this miserable weather.

Take-out and new beginning

And this is how this trip ended. At 11:00 a.m. sharp I arrived at the Jonesport ramp and met Nancy. I felt relieved, and so was she. Our trip home to Orono was a bit more subdued than usual. But that was to be expected. And yet I felt a bit empty, since this trip was to be my big summer solo ocean canoe trip. But maybe I'd get my cedar fence repaired instead, I thought nobly, and our summer cottage could use a new coat of paint.

A couple of days later, I received a brief e-mail from our son Mark: "Dad, want to sail? My sailing partner Dave pulled out his back and can't come. It's the big multi-hull race in Cowichan Bay off Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The race is this weekend."

"Beam me up, Mark," was my instant answer. "I'd love to fly an outrigger with you. 14 knots sounds fine. No, seriously, who is tending the jib sheets?" I had sailed and even raced with Mark on his 23' extremely fast trimaran *Osprey*, and was absolutely mesmerized by its raw speed.

Nancy had noticed the gleam in my eyes and was already planning and phoning. Let's see: you have less than 24 hours to get a flight and get ready, then get out to Bellingham in one long day, meet Mark at the airport hotel (he was flying in from Austin, Texas). You two would then need to register and insure the boat, buy provisions, and would sail off by early afternoon and sail the 38 miles to South Pender Island, British Columbia, the official entry point for sailboats in that part of Canada, a very long day, but doable, if you keep pushing. Next day, 20 more miles to Cowichan Bay off Vancouver Island. You would then race the 4 races in the next 2 days and leave immediately after the last race for Roche Island, the official entry harbor back into the US. Next day you would sail back to Bellingham, put up the boat, celebrate with Dave, and bus/fly home early the following day. A tight package. Forget about making overnight reservations: you two can sleep on the nets between hull and outriggers. Don't forget to take a sleeping bag and survival blanket! (And oh yes, I would have one day in Maine to get ready for Nancy's and my trip to Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada.)

Done! What a girl! All I had to do, was pack a few personal things, be there at the right place at the right time, and follow the plan – I do that very well indeed. Suddenly my aborted downeast Maine trip did not look so bad any more. I had great hopes for sailing in a multi-hull regatta with our son Mark, a total of seven days, off Vancouver Island and through the San Juan Islands. So I had to lose some first, only to win in the end. I was ready and eager to go.

The race is on – just to get to the races

It helped that I could fly right out of Bangor, Maine, just 8 miles from home, and catch a morning flight via Detroit to Seattle, where I could catch a bus to Bellingham, Washington. Staying at the airport hotel also meant I did not have to get a taxi, and Mark could join me there later that night, coming in from Austin, Texas.

The morning was full of important chores, but buying supplies for the two of us was simple – lots of prepared sandwiches, a couple of hard German sausages and a six-pack of beer. The pièce de résistance was a large box of plump, ripe cherries and an equally large box of ginger cookies –

Mark's choice, which made for great snacks during the races.

Dave drove us to the marina and wistfully waved us off, wishing his back would suddenly miraculously recover, and since it did not, wished us the best of luck in the races.

We were off. I was quickly re-learning all the many color-coded lines, the halyards, the sheets for jib, reacher and maxi, Cunningham, mast rotation, outhaul, leech tension, center-board and tiller adjustment. According to my son Mark, old Dad had not lost it yet, and I felt good, sharp, and very eager to see how the two of us would do in the race, as well as sail-camping.

Mark and I had sailed together in our little 22' Venture swing-keeler along the coast of Maine when he was younger, and always hit it off right. He was a quick learner, and now he was the skipper and I was his crew. I absolutely loved the reversal of roles, especially since he knew the boat and even the race course many times better than I did.

Under jib and main we sailed into Bellingham Bay and out towards our new course, due west between Portage and Lummi Island. We anticipated more wind and put a reef in the main before we stuck our bow around that very pronounced, tall island. Minutes later we even rolled up the jib and howled along like a banshee in beam seas, skipping across from crest to crest at up to 18 knots. It was the most exhilarating sailing I had ever done. The speed was immense, the water was flying into our faces, but felt GOOD, WET AND FAST!

This was sailing at its best, folks! I had sailed fast on dinghies, even got up to 10.3 knots on the 60' yawl *Peter von Seestermühe* across the Atlantic from Antigua/Caribbean via the Azores to Hamburg, Germany just a couple of years ago. Mark and I traded the helm every 30 minutes. I could steer the boat with my fingertips, it was so responsive, and I was able to avoid the bigger crests, putting the hull and down-wind ama gently into the next trough. (We always flew the windward ama.) I had a ball!

We sailed the 38 miles to the Poets' Cove on South Pender Island, British Columbia in a little over 3 hours, which meant we averaged about 12 knots. Not bad at all. We tied up at the official Canadian port entry dock around supper time. Our papers were in order, and all went fine. We even were able to take a brief hot shower in the spa/marina. I feared for only one casualty: my brand new digital camera, which I had zipped into my little day bag and put/jammed tight in the centerboard well, off the floor. However, it got dislodged and floated happily in the well till we finally noticed it. Oh, no! Not another camera ruined, I thought to myself with lots of guilt feelings, since it was a special present from Nancy. But when I opened the bag, I found I had put the camera in a new double-zip-lock sandwich bag, and it was as dry as a piece of styrofoam, and still worked – phew! My notebook, though, was a soggy mess, and all notes had to be re-written.

The marina was full of boats, about 50% sailboats and 50% cruising power boats, all with cozy looking stand-up cabins, some with wood smoke emanating out of their little stainless steel chimneys. Sorry, no such luck on our boat. I spread out my sleeping bag on the starboard trampoline netting between hull and ama/outrigger, while Mark settled down under folded mainsail on port. I vividly remember protesting against taking my aluminum survival blanket along, but Nancy insisted, and I was now so glad she did. It started to rain, and it rained all night, and some other nights too. And when it was not raining at night, the dew was so heavy that it surely felt as if it had been raining or at least misting.

So, wrapped in my sleeping bag and survival blanket, I tried to catch some sleep, which came fitfully. We were tired, but had to check our situation frequently. But morning came eventually. We even managed to get some hot coffee and warm croissants at the marina, and the day started much better than first feared. The wind sprang up for main and jib, occasionally boosted by our 2-horse Honda outboard motor. The scenery of the San Juan Islands was absolutely spectacular. It felt like

sailing on Mahone Bay in Nova Scotia, Canada, or Penobscot Bay in Maine. There was a myriad of islands and ledges and lots of passages, with lots of big ferry boats steaming through at a good clip. And yes, then there was the main channel from the open Pacific Ocean into Vancouver Harbor proper. Numerous container ships were slowly pushing their way through the islands, like a herd of big African elephants.

We stayed nicely out of everybody's way, which was not difficult at the speed we were sailing. And after a gentle turn to starboard, we entered Cowichan Bay (often called "Cow Bay" for short), where the sailing regatta was to be held. Prestigious monohull class races were to be contested there this coming weekend (August 3/4), like the *Melges 24*, as well as an assortment of bigger yachts racing to a specific handicap formula, and of course the multihull class, which we were entering. This bay was chosen, I understood, because it sports a consistently strong sea breeze that blows up the bay, replacing the hot air rising over land in late summer.

We tied up to the inside of the outer breakwater and set up our "camp" on board *Osprey*, like last night. Mark introduced me to a lot of his sailing cronies who had come from as far away as Seattle and Vancouver. Yes, a regatta is also a social event, and crews from competitive boats were checking out everything and everybody. How would Mark do with his old Dad? Is he handicapping himself? Where is Dave? Who is this stranger, anyway? Mark assured them with a wink that his Dad should do all right.

Off to the races

Son Mark had to row ashore for the skippers' meeting, where they were handed today's course and time sheets. "And while you are ashore, Mark, could you get us some coffee and a couple of croissants at the local bakery? Our stove refuses to start up." (We did not even have one, which you probably knew already.) Almost always, sailors enjoy a leisurely breakfast, because it takes the wind some time to spring up in the morning. This way, sailing is fun and not a drifting agony.

We sailed out as soon as there was wind, practiced a few maneuvers, especially jibing the big maxi sail, a huge, overlapping cruising spinnaker/genoa of sorts, which necessitated me getting out on the narrow bowsprit and leading the clew, where the sheets are attached to the sail, around to the other side. I loved it, sitting there on that thin pole, balancing, grabbing the sheets and making sure they would cleanly move to the other side, without hanging up on the forestay or furled jib. On the upwind leg, I would tack the jib, and if necessary, tighten the Cunningham, rotate the mast and adjust the traveller.

At the start of the first race, Mark managed to claim the favored place next to the committee boat on the starboard end of the starting line. This would allow us to claim starboard right-of-way over all other boats to our left. I was surprised that nobody challenged us, but maybe they thought we were small fry with our self-designed, home-built, one-off 23' trimaran and did not bother. We did great, the boat ran well, but could have run even faster, had we had more wind. With our PHRF rating of 40, we came in third in our multi-hull class of eleven, a very respectable result.

A half hour after the end of the first race, the second race started. This was a slightly shorter race to different turning points. At the start we were this time luffed/bullied out of position and unceremoniously pushed to the right of the committee boat and had to do an extra loop around it, while everybody else was flying off to the port shore. We came in 5th this time, but learned a lot.

Back at the dock, we inflated the dinghy, which we carried on the netting, got into some shore clothes and joined the crowd for a big beach cook-out on Cowichan Tribe lands. Thanks guys!

The margaritas unfortunately ran out too fast, but the steak, baked potatoes and huge salad, mixed and served out of a real sailing dinghy, were excellent. The live music was appropriately loud,

booming across the bay, but nobody minded, since the whole community was involved in this race. My purple earplugs did their trick again back on board, allowing me to catch 40 winks to gather the energy for tomorrow's races.

Since the wind was slow in coming up, we started with a shorter race. We sailed hard, occasionally mixing with the front runners, only to be left behind when they hoisted their huge spinnakers. We came in 4th on corrected time. But then the wind sprang up, and both Mark and I got a gleam in our eye. This was more like it. Our *Osprey* loved the conditions and could have handled even more of the same stuff. The tide was running into the bay, so sailing out to the first mark, everybody was short-tacking along the right shore. But then Mark and I almost simultaneously noticed a new wind building way over on the other shore, and we went for it. At the 9-mile turning mark, we were the second boat, behind a Formula 40 catamaran (the same boat as in the preliminary America's Cup races), twice our length. We beamed from ear to ear and only lost one spot to another much bigger trimaran to the finish line. So we came in third in that race of eleven boats, and also on corrected time, a tremendous achievement for our little boat.

We soon found out that we also placed third in the multi-hull division in the entire regatta, and were delighted. But our elation was short; we could not stay for the awards ceremonies, but had to pack up immediately and push off towards Roche Harbor (on San Juan Island, near Friday Harbor), the official U.S. entry point for sailboats in this area. We had to make it before 8:00 p.m., when customs would close. So we pushed hard, even asking for extra Honda power to get us there.

It was 8:01 p.m. as Mark jumped on the dock, papers and cell phone in hand, but the officer had already left. Bummer! But when 3 more boats showed up, he relented and came back over from Friday Harbor and checked us in. We were both tired, but Mark mustered enough energy to walk up to the marina, and minutes later showed up with a clam dinner for me and steak for him. The night was again cold and damp, but who cared, we were back in the U.S., sleeping out on deck under a starry night, right under the Big Dipper, it seemed.

The home stretch

Coffee and fresh apple-cider doughnuts tasted great at the marina. We then pushed off for Bellingham, and I was amazed again, that Mark was doing the entire course from memory, as he had the 58 miles over to Cowichan Bay. I, on the other hand, enjoyed looking at the chart to see where I was and where we were going, basically east this time. I was surprised how strong the currents between the islands were, occasionally whipping up real tidal rips, which were quite challenging for our little Honda outboard. But then the wind came up again, and we had another howler across the more open bay from Orcas to Lummi Island.

We arrived in good time that afternoon, tied up, tidied up, stowed gear and sails, and were off the boat. Dave was there with his old beat-up van, and could hardly wait to hear how we did. WE DID FINE – THIRD OVER-ALL IN THE MULTI-HULL DIVISION! He beamed as he drove us to his house for the overnight. I then invited both Mark and Dave out to a nice seafood restaurant to celebrate. A local client, overhearing our enthused conversations, quietly ordered us a scrumptious dish of fried prawns served on a bed of greens. What a nice gesture! He was proud of what the local Bellingham boat had achieved. I located him at the corner table, went over and thanked him, which truly touched him, as it had us.

Next morning came very early, especially after two beers the evening before. But what the heck, we had good reason to celebrate.

I took the bus from Bellingham to the Seattle airport, from where I flew via New York/LaGuardia back to Bangor. At about midnight, Nancy was there to pick me up. I was tired all right, but could not

stop telling her our story till 2:00 a.m. The whole trip had been a spur-of-the-moment decision, but one which really worked out. It was a great success all around, both from a sailing as well as personal point of view. What a relief, what a triumph and victory for spontaneity!

The meaning of it all

You did well, son, in designing, building and sailing your lovely, sprightly and oh-so-fast 23' trimaran *Osprey*. I am proud of you, for so many reasons. I really enjoyed sailing with you again. It was just like old times, only now you are at the helm, which is just fine with me. I hope you enjoyed the races as much as I did and do not feel the old man let you down.

Who knows, we may sail and race together again some time. Till then, keep the open side of the boat up, and may you have at least 5' of water under your keel (for centerboard and rudder, that is). And just think, if I had not aborted my trip along the downeast coast of Maine, I would not have been able to come out to sail with you on beautiful Cowichan Bay and amongst the San Juan Islands for this most memorable father-son adventure.

Mast und Schotbruch! ("mast and sheet break", the German nautical equivalent of the American theatrical good luck wish: "Break a leg!")

Ahoy!

With love,

Dad/Grandpa

Reinhard

PS: This story, I just noticed, has become another chapter to a previous article of mine entitled "My Turn at the Helm". In it I traced the generational changes from my grandfather Capt. Willi Zollitsch to me. And with this story I now hand over the helm to our oldest son Mark on his high-tech trimaran *Osprey*. I know your boat and your family with your three boys are in very good hands. Take care, be prudent and safe, but most of all ENJOY.