

STRUCK!

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It was June 13, 1993 and we are well into the summer Thunderstorm season. Dan and I got up early and quite happily noticed that the Sun was out along with a light breeze. What a lovely day to go sailboat racing on the Indian River given that the weather forecast can be questionable this time of year. We gathered our sea bags, hooked up the boat, and headed for the Titusville Yacht Club (remembering to run back into the house for the bottle of wine, in case we finished in the "money" and needed to celebrate).

With spirits high and plans laid, we arrived in plenty of time to register and launch the boat. As discussed with great enthusiasm at the club meetings, LMSA members showed up in force to "invade" the regatta with plans of taking home as many trophies as possible. With the usual camaraderie, everyone docked their boats, checked rigging, double-checked that necessary "beverages" were on hand, and prepared sails for racing mode. The wind had become very light to almost non-existent; we began to hope it would increase with the start of the race imminent.

With more than a dozen boats milling around the start line, the race began with high hopes and the competitive spirit building. The wind had temporarily filled in with a light 5 knots with intermittent puffs and lulls. The course would be approximately 13 miles winding its way down the ICW and back again. After jockeying for position with a boat, twice our size, we got off to a great start being the third boat across the line. However, as "Murphy's Law" would have it, at the first mark the wind shifted around behind us giving the rest of the fleet our much-desired wind. Within minutes, the high hopes and excitement of being in the forefront became despondent feelings and frustration of being the next to last boat on the river. Nevertheless, we don't give up that easy. After much discussion and persistence on Dan part, we stayed to the left of the river and feverishly wished for the prevailing afternoon sea breeze. Behold, it happens! The east winds start to build and we are heading for the next marker. Boat after boat is passed as our tactical decision pays off.

As we again patted ourselves on the back, the day couldn't be nicer, a gorgeous sunny day with light winds. All the while, we continually gained on the leaders who had sailed into more intermittent light air pockets. Finally, we were back in the money with visions of trophies lining our pockets. After we rounded the leeward mark the wind begin to build, but being in the race mode, we kept full light wind sails flying in hopes of catching the leader of our class.

As we sailed back up towards the finish line and marina, we noticed the usual thunderheads were building off to the west. We have faced this situation before with some excitement but no other consequence than a little wetness coming from it. After making a few comments about the pending clouds, our attention was reclaimed in the effort to find the next marker in the building seas.

From time to time, we would glance at the looming clouds. Having just purchased Lottery tickets I jokingly commented, "Which odds are greater, getting hit by lightning or winning the lottery". Finally, we decided that some of the rain might be heading our way, so I commenced to find the weatherboards and secure the hatch for a brief spell of rain. Intent upon keeping the cabin dry, I had cleated the headsail sheets off to free my hands for the impending tasks. Another concern racing through my mind was the fact that in the upcoming rain I was going to get cold having only a bikini as a shield me against the weather. The angle of the boat began to change and footing became difficult as I realized time was getting short. We needed to de-power the headsail. Better yet, douse it, as the wind velocity began to quickly intensify. Concurring with my racing thoughts, I heard Dan shouting over the heightened winds to loosen the headsail. Realizing that I had screwed up and shut the lines inside the secured hatch cover, the ideal to drop the headsail was short lived, I had to take action. Dan seem to be having difficulty in keeping the boat under control but I didn't have time to question it, I could only think of releasing the Genoa sheet and keep my balance at the same time.

Then it happened!!! Dan shouted, "HANG ON!!!" as the boat continued to heel at an amazing angle. Having sailed on numerous different Precision manufactured boats, I couldn't believe that the boat could or would actually be knocked down. However, as I did a back flip into the water, the realization struck me, Yep!, this boat can be knocked over. Remembering Dan's last words I started grabbing for something to hang on to, "Thank you, Vang Sheet". Startled by the fact that I was under water I grabbed the first thing that I saw with my eyes open under water (something that does not occur very often). The world started to move in slow motion as I pulled myself up against the top of the companionway hatch, which was now perpendicular to the water. After checking with each other that we were ok, now, both alive and not bleeding we started to figure out what action would resolve the present situation. We both concurred that we should get the sails down (I mean moved sideways), maybe the water in the sails was preventing the boat from righting itself (which it should do by design).

Nothing happened. The boat continued to lie on its side like a wrecked tricycle. So I made myself comfortable as possible, as I realized that the

water wasn't too cold and that the tag line on my hat was slightly choking me. After what seem like eternity sometimes and just seconds at other times, Dan decided that we needed to do something else besides wait for the boat to do its thing. He started climbing up through the cockpit to the top (side) of the boat, as soon as he was halfway up the boat started to move. Like a slingshot, I was now on top of the boat heading over to the other side. Nimble as a wet cat, Dan scrambled to the middle of the boat as it promptly righted itself.

Alas, we had prevailed and overcome our knock down. With not a moment to relax, we turned to the next task. Dan rushed to the foredeck to drop the anchor as I sat in the cockpit trying to shield myself from the tiny bits of hail and untangle the amazing mess of line and boat parts. The bug sprayer (also known as a sailor-shower), the silver hard hat and the main sheet were very tangled up with the racing traveler system. The boom was hanging off the boat with the "racing" main luffing in the raging wind. As fast as my shaking hands could work I unraveled the snarled mess trying to get enough slack to secure the boom and mainsheet. I began to make headway with the disarray in front of me as we realized one of our closest competitor to our stern had sank and the survivors were hanging onto the top of the mast, waving for help.

All around us, lightning was flashing, and we were barraged with the continual booming of thunder but something (still to this day) unidentified made me look up just as I was reaching for the main sheet to bring the boom in. Look at the gorgeously pure blue light coming down the boom! Why is someone screaming? The blue light is covering my left arm! PAIN! What is causing the searing burning feeling between my shoulder blades? Realization! I was the one that screamed, but it's over, I think? I can't move very well, but I held my hands in front of me looking at the palms, they were shaking (worse than I ever saw my Grandma's palsy stricken hands). "Are you ok!?" I realize that's Dan shouting at me, bringing me back from amazement and I guess shock. I mentally check the rest of my body, besides the stinging pain on my back everything seems to be working.

By this time, we realize that maybe staying outside in the cockpit is not a good place to be for a while. With Dan, behind me, urging me below I remove the companion-way hatch cover and top weather board, going below sounds like a good idea at this time. But wait! Something's not right, where is all that smoke coming from? I don't want to go down where I can't breathe. Smoke!, smoke means something might be on fire! Fire! Look at the orange glow in the V-berth. Thinking that this boat is not that small, but still it's not big enough to have a fire and us on it at the same time. Got to see what is on fire and put it out!! Being first in line, I get to be the designated fireman (fireperson) by default. Looking around the bulkhead partition, I see the

headliner along with curtain on the starboard side is aflame, and the fire is spreading rapidly. Taking a quick glance around I can't find anything that will hold water, in the chaotic tossed contents of the cabin. I knew that the longer I delayed the more difficult it would be to put out the fire. Without thinking of anything else, but the need to destroy the fire, I quickly started slapping the fire with my hands. The wet sailing gloves on my hands made quick work in putting out the fire. I felt a few stinging spots on my wrist as the melted flaming fabric tried to cling to my skin. Relief rushed over me as I realized that I was successful. Now all we had to do was to secure the luggage and contents of the cabin then do something with the water covering our feet.

The water was about six inches deep in cabin floor; I assume we had it taken on during the knockdown. We were still experiencing the desire and urgency to secure our well being and provide assistance to our fellow sailors with the sunken boat. With the winds still howling across the bow, in somewhat decreasing winds, we set about salvaging all equipment and sails that we could get our hands on. Cushions were askew, sails had come out of their prospective sail bags, lines and other sailing hardware mingled in the gallons of water along with other personnel effects that had been tossed in the floor and were covered in salt water. We begin to remove equipment and effects from the flooded floor, keeping in mind that if lightening wanted to strike twice, we should keep our feet out of the water. Having cleared enough room to allow bailing we looked around and tried to remember where the bucket was. Conclusion: The bucket was outside in the lazaret. Neither of us could summon the courage to face the elements in full force again if we could avoid it. We grabbed the 10-gallon trash can (luckily containing a removable trash bag) and started to bail. I continued to bail at a fierce pace while Dan went back to the cockpit, the winds had diminished to 15 - 20 knots and the rain was now just remnants of the former down pour. In what seem like eternity, I dumped bucket after bucket of water out of the cabin. Finally, my back started to give out, the ebbing adrenalin started to allow me time to think. This water level should be decreasing. Where is all the water coming from? I decided to take a look under the V-berth cushions to see exactly how much water was still in the boat. "DAN!!!!!! WE GOT A HOLE IN THE BOAT!" In total amazement I stared at the water gushing up through the bottom of the boat where the Knot Meter Impeller Coil was suppose to be. A fountain of 6 to 8 inches was rising straight up out of the bottom of the boat and poured water into the cabin at an amazing rate.

Dan was at my side in an instance. He immediately put his hand over the hole, but we weren't going to be able to return to land very easily with Dan holding his "finger in the dike". With the cabin still in a shambles, we began a frantic search for something to plug the hole with. Dan found a bottle of vitamins floating around that amazingly fit in the hole almost perfectly. Now

we had to find a way to make it stay in place. Needed something tall, ah, a partially full bottle of Rum. No, that didn't work, the pressure of the water and trying to hold it in place crushed the plastic container. What else was tall? Look! Our bottle of "victory" wine... Perfect! Now, we needed something flat to lay on top of the bottle to allow the V-berth cushion to put pressure on it and not puncture the material. Crabbing the first flat item, I saw, the wooden stove cover that goes over the trash can. We completed the ensemble, and we were successful in averting another pending disaster.

Again, we transferred our energies to weighing anchor and rendering assistance to the four people clinging onto the tip of their 30-foot mast that was still above water. Within a few short minutes, we were under motor and at their side. Having lost all available docks line overboard, I secured the main sheet and threw it to one of the adults. He successfully caught the line on the first try and quickly assisted everyone aboard.

As we all huddle together, taking turns bailing the small amount of water still coming in through our patch job, one thought crossed my mind, maybe we should only challenge Mother Nature to a certain point. I didn't win the Lottery.