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## A Literal Rite of Passage

Logbook entry Sunday, November 6, 2011. Wind : none, although it was supposed to be 5 knots from the north-northwest. Time: somewhere around 7:15 a.m., the first day of standard time, the wet and cool summer only the blink of an eye behind us.

I told Joshua Herbert, who will be 18 years old on December 10th, that he could stay at Grandma's house and sleep in, if he likes. After all, the poor thing has had the stress of applying to college amidst competition from friends, the eager energies of his parents, and the enthusiasm of his teachers. He is the very definition of a good kid; he drives his mother's Mazda Miata convertible to school very carefully. Okay, she just had shoulder surgery and cannot drive a stick-shift anyway. So what, that we have allowed him to drive the cool 2-seater to school long before we had a convenient excuse.

Sunday morning, November 6th, was a cold, perfect dawn. It was frigid enough overnight for the dock and the ramp leading to the float to be covered with a thin sheen of ice. The mist rose from the warmer water along the shore like some mysterious vapor in a scary movie. As Joshua rowed us out to Dream Extreme, our Catalina 34 tall rig, in a working rowboat as old as Joshua's father, we marveled at the silence. The slow dipping of the oars in water with the consistency of cream was nearly noiseless. Imperceptibly at first, but with slow determination, Joshua rowed the old skiff to one of only two boats remaining at the Stepping Stone anchorage.

A lover weary from a long journey could not have been more impressed with the sight of his mistress than I was to see the classically teak-trimmed white hulled sailboat await our arrival. To say there was not a cloud in the sky, as the sun began to rise in the east, would be an understatement. The world truly did feel as though it were born on that very morning; fresh, clean, clear, cool, crisp, delightful, and willing to offer up all of its glories to an optimist.

After climbing over the transom from the swim platform with our gear and securing the wooden skiff to a stern cleat, we started about the ritual of firing up the old iron Genny, as dedicated sailors like to call the auxiliary engines in their boats. Whether it was the cold or the antique battery, it took some time to turn over the 20-something-year-old Universal diesel. Fire up she did, and the first stop was Stepping Stone dock to drop off the rowboat. A Hispanic man, who was standing on the dock next to an elderly orthodox Jew wearing his kippah, came down the gangway to the floating dock to help us by taking the line of the rowboat. As we turned our stern to the dock and headed northeast, I peered back at the two men on the dock and wondered what had brought them together on this cold, but nevertheless inviting, Sunday morning. Two diverse people in a glorious spot, appreciating a treasure together that few people on this planet will ever know. I want to think them friends or perhaps helper and the assisted.

Steaming out of the anchorage in early November is always a sad but strangely appealing moment. Joshua usually likes to take the wheel, but he must have sensed my dismay and he stood aside. I throttled Dream Extreme up to 2200 rpm's and headed for buoy 29 at King's Point. We talked little. I concentrated on the pleasing hum of a well-maintained diesel engine pushing the almost 6 tons of fiberglass and wood towards Manhasset Bay. Temperature "okay", amp meter shows the batteries are charging, engine running at a cool 170 degree temperature, and everything is perfect in the world at this one moment.

We rounded King's Point and headed down the mouth of Manhasset Bay. The only other boat we saw was a magnificent yacht which passed us closely, rounding the same buoy 29 but heading for the East River

and ultimately some exotic port in the south or perhaps the Caribbean. What a lovely boat she was; two roller furlings at her headstay, one probably a storm jib and the other a genoa, with a mizenmast and manned by three warmly dressed sailors. It was now high tide and a perfect time for a sailing vessel to negotiate the East River, pass Manhattan on her starboard side and head for the open Atlantic. For more than a moment I was envious as I thought of the northern winter which lies ahead for us, while these intrepid sailors obviously would be testing their skills in the warm southerly waters of the Atlantic while gaping at semi-clad women. Sounds like a tough life.

First we headed to the pumpout station at the town dock in Port Washington. While the village has become gentrified and wealthy with more restaurants and boutiques than it needs, Port Washington does still somehow manage to maintain the feel of a traditional sailing community. From the pumpout station we negotiated our way to the Shell fuel dock, where we found a pleasant young man to top off our vessel with diesel fuel. In an entire season we used about four gallons of fuel, confirming my deserved reputation as more of a sailor than a stinkpot kind of guy.

Our final stop was Tom's Point Marina. I circled left and swung around to starboard, placing Dream Extreme's portside perfectly against the dock. The third dock we had negotiated, once again showing the boat handling skills of a former United States Coast Guard licensed launch operator. I think I am as proud of that heritage as probably any academic achievement I have attained.

At Tom's Point it was the traditional work; bending the sails off the boat, removing the battens, changing the oil and oil filter, running antifreeze through the raw water intake, filling each freshwater tank with one gallon of antifreeze, and putting a gallon down the head. By 1:30 my wife was on the shore, sending urgent pleas for us to leave the boat, my daughter having inadvertently locked my 96-year-old mother out of the house! Reality intrudes and Dream Extreme must wait another day to be pampered for the winter.

Through the many years of boat ownership, I have watched Joshua grow from an eager young lad, wanting nothing more than to please dad, into a fine, tall, strong young man, without whose help I could no longer own this boat. When I talked to Kim about what a delight it was to spend the day with Joshua on the water, I expressed to her some surprise on Joshua's readiness to leave first thing in the morning and that he never once kvetched about helping out the old man. Well of course there was the one time when I criticized how he tied up the boat and he referred to my boat-tying habits as "OCD." I nearly keelhailed him at that, until I realized, of course, that he was correct.

"Well," Kim said, "I talked to him about it last night and pointed out to him how bringing out the boat in the spring and putting her to bed for the winter has become an important rite of passage." Naturally, Kim was right on once again. Whether it was Kim's kind, understanding words that motivated Joshua or just a simple desire to help out dad is irrelevant. What counts is that during these teenage years of stress, pimples, school-work, college pressure and girls, the kid still wants to help out dad. Dad appreciates it more than Joshua will ever know.

I remember meeting one of my father's friends, John DiRosa, at a dock in City Island, New York, some years after my father passed away. John asked me some questions about my career. I was surprised that this business friend of my father would have known anything about my travails as a young lawyer, but John reminded me how proud my father was and how eagerly he expressed that to his friends. My dad was not the type to have said such things to me directly. I was touched and determined to let my own son know how much I love and appreciate him.

Joshua, you are the best, and my day with you was so satisfying that I needed to record these words, even if no one else reads them.