

A Frustrating Day

by Suzy Hopkins

Even at age 11 I knew what the little red flag flapping on the flag pole at the Boston Yacht Club meant – small craft warning. This meant we could expect sustained wind speeds and gusts from 32-38 miles per hour and waves 5-7 feet. There had been a storm off the coast which had created enormous swells which I dreaded because they usually made me seasick. My father rowed my family to our moored 50' sailboat but had a difficult time landing because of the swells in the harbor. It took numerous tries to get us all aboard. He felt we were not a small craft and were going out sailing anyway.

After leaving the relatively calm harbor we entered an area which had white caps on the waves. Not a good sign. My mother was already below in her bunk since she got seasick every time we went sailing. My one- and two-year-old sisters were tethered in their life Jackets to the cord that went up both sides of the boat. After hoisting the sails I went below to sleep off the seasickness.

Next thing I know my father is hollering for me to come up on deck. The front sail had become detached at the bow and was flailing around in the stiff wind. I steered the boat as best I could which was difficult in the huge swells. The boat wanted to hit them sideways which could capsize the boat so I had to keep steering into them which was not easy with the sails up.

Then the fog came in. My father had managed to get the sail reattached and lowered all three sails. We motored into the swells. A big sailboat like that has a comparatively small motor used for coming up to a dock, picking up the mooring or dropping anchor. I had to sit, seasick as I was, right at the bow blowing the foghorn in a regular pattern to warn other boats. We went as close to shore as we could to get out of the fog but that meant my other job was to look for other boats and large rocks looming in the rough seas. I was terrified. My whole family depended on my seeing any rocks and telling my father quickly enough so he could steer to miss them. I was freezing from the fog and sick as could be.

After what seemed two lifetimes, we headed back to the harbor with the swells propelling the boat. Now I had hope that we would survive this horrible experience. Miraculously the fog parted and much to my surprise and joy we had blue skies.