

Cold Soup and Other Adventures

Paul Gray, Schooner *Quintessence*

Some sailing trips are memorable because of new places and friends found along the way. Some because of time spent with old friends. Others become memorable for other reasons, for challenges encountered and overcome. A recent planned trip to Block Island on my schooner *Quintessence* mixed these all together to create a truly memorable trip!

It was a simple enough plan. Two friends, Bill Hamilton and Richard Dolejan, were joining me for an offshore run from Toms River, NJ to Block Island. *Quintessence*, underwent extensive repairs and upgrades over the past several months and this was her first major excursion. Kind of a “shake-down” cruise. It is safe to say she has been truly and thoroughly shaken down!

After a marathon weekend of last minute work we headed out early in the morning on Monday, July 20. Our run through the shallows and bridges of the northern half of Barnegat Bay proved uneventful. We only touched bottom once, and we caught the northerly flood current through the Point Pleasant Canal! By mid-day we had reached Manasquan Inlet.

The route from Manasquan to Block Island is very straightforward. The first leg is a 117 mile ENE run to Montauk Point. From Montauk, Block Island is a short 13 miles NNE. If we could manage a 5 knot speed made good it would take us around 26 hours to reach Block Island.

We headed out of the inlet and hoisted sail. While the forecast had been for light 5-10 knot winds out of the south, the wind was actually coming out of the ENE, putting Montauk directly upwind. So much for our 5 knots made good! We headed north along the coast for a while, and then tacked out. On this tack we were heading slightly south of east, and were soon once again off Manasquan Inlet, but several miles out. We tacked north again, with the hope that the wind would eventually come round to the south as forecast.

We had a wonderful afternoon sail along the coast, with mainsail, foresail, staysail, jib and main topmast staysail set. Even with the light winds we were able to move along at five to six knots. As we neared Sandy Hook, the wind veered toward the south, allowing us to sail a more eastward course along Long Island. If this kept up we could make some progress in the direction we actually wanted to go in!

Unfortunately, the winds became more variable and by 2000 we were sitting more than sailing, with a forecast for

the night for 10-15 knot winds directly out of the east. At that point we dropped sails, fired up the engine and started eastward along the south shore of Long Island. My watch was up and I went below to get some sleep.

Conditions had changed dramatically by the time I came on watch at 0100. Reaching the deck I found the Fire Island light off our port bow, an east wind blowing 17-20 knots with 25 knot gusts and seas running a steep 4-5'. Although not really large, the steepness was enough to cause *Quintessence* to routinely bury her bowsprit and foredeck, keeping a constant stream of water running along her decks. Our speed had dropped to around 4 knots as we pushed eastward into the wind and seas. Around 0300 the skies opened up and it started raining. Not your run-of-the-mill casual rain. A monsoon. Measurements made along Long Island at the time showed rainfall in excess of 1" per hour. Unfortunately, *Quintessence's* dodger had not been reinstalled prior to the trip. It was going to be a long night.

The first night watch at sea is always a tough one for me. I have almost invariably spent the previous days getting everything ready for the trip and getting very little sleep in the process. The first day at sea is always busy, and I very rarely get much sleep prior to my watch. At best I can usually count on only a couple of hours sleep before coming back on deck. Couple that with the rain and the seas, and it was going to be a very long night indeed. Sunrise seemed a long way off.

My watch went by slowly, but the sunrise brought renewed energy, as well as a lessening of rain. I let the watch below sleep an extra hour before calling Bill up. We were about 20 miles east of Fire Island Inlet as I headed below. I had just reached the bottom of companionway ladder when the engine RPM's surged as if somewhat had pushed the engine to full throttle. I looked up to see what Bill was up to, to find he wasn't anywhere near the throttle. A second later the engine stopped. Back in the cockpit, I tried to re-start the engine. It cranked but wouldn't start. Time to hoist a sail. A few minutes work forward and the foresail was up and drawing, holding us bow into the wind and seas as we slowly forereached away from the coast. A quick check revealed no obvious problems; we had plenty of fuel and the filter showed clean fuel and no water.

We decided our best course of action was to run back downwind, get a tow in somewhere and find a mechanic. A quick look at the charts confirmed that Fire Island Inlet was the most obvious choice. I had never been through the inlet, and had heard only nasty things about it. I contacted the Fire Island Coast Guard Station to let them know our situation. They confirmed that there was a TowboatUS at Fire Island (never go out without unlimited

towing!) and that, despite what I had heard, we would have no problem getting through the inlet under tow. The Coast Guard established a communications schedule with us, contacting us every hour on the hour to make sure no problems developed.

The three hour run downwind along Fire Island proved entirely uneventful. As anyone who has sailed knows, turning away from the wind changes everything. We were making 6 knots, under foresail alone, which dropped the apparent wind to around 11 knots. At around 1100 we hove-to by the Fire Island "FI" alpha buoy and waited just a short while for the tow boat to arrive. The towboat skipper was worried about our bowsprit. He was afraid that the towing bridle might damage it if *Quintessence* were to swing away from the towline. The best course of action, we decided, was for me to steer *Quintessence* along behind the tow, contrary to his normal procedure of keeping a towed boat's rudder centered. I would try to keep *Quintessence's* bowsprit pointed at the towing bits at all times.

The yard we were heading to was located on the north shore of the Great South Bay, in Bay Shore, NY. After a couple of somewhat trying hours we were tied up at the yard with a promise that a mechanic would be out first thing Wednesday morning.

After punching through waves and rain all night long, *Quintessence* was a mess. The constant pounding through waves had shaken a lot of things loose and water had come in around the Samson post. The v-berth took the worst of it, with everything stored forward now heaped in wet piles of clothing bags, sail bags, bosun's stores and provisions.

I made a command decision to abandon ship and we headed off to the nearest hotel in search of showers and dry clothes. To add insult to injury, the skies opened up again and we walked the half mile to the hotel in the pouring rain. After showering and changing to (relatively) dry clothes we headed to a nearby sushi restaurant. The restaurant turned out to get very good and we finished up the day with a wonderful dinner of sushi, tea, soup, some great Japanese entrees and tempura fried ice cream.

All and all, a very interesting day.

Wednesday dawned sunny and dry. I headed back over to *Quintessence*, opened her up, and started bringing everything above decks to dry. Bill and Richard soon joined me and *Quintessence* was soon festooned with foul weather gear, cushions, sleeping bags, clothing, towels, charts and anything else that needed drying out. Schooners have lots of rigging and we put it to good use!

The mechanic arrived around 1100 and quickly diagnosed the problem. Threads on a plastic fitting on the fuel filter had cracked, allowing air to be pulled into the fuel line. A few phone calls and off he went to get the replacement part. We grabbed lunch and arrived back to find the mechanic back and the engine running. There was some other bad news though. Our fuel was contaminated with water, a lot of water. There were no o-rings on the fuel fill plates, and the constant flood of water across our decks had pushed water into the tanks. After a quick search in the yard shop we located a couple of o-rings that would work. The contaminated fuel was pumped out leaving us with around five gallons of clean fuel on board. Plenty to get us to the fuel dock next door, but then what?

It was time to re-assess our plans. Our backtracking during the night had put us around 70 miles west of Montauk. Richard had to be back at Tom's River by noon Saturday. Pushing on to Block Island or even Montauk didn't make much sense; we would have to leave as soon as we got there. A few minutes of discussion and we had a new plan. We would head over to Fire Island for the night, then to Sandy Hook, NJ.

I asked around the yard for suggestions for Fire Island, and was told we had to go to the Kismet. We had to stay at the Kismet Inn Marina for the night. Great place! Live music, great food and the world's best gin and tonics. While not a big drinker, the recommendation was so enthusiastic, I couldn't refuse. A couple of minutes of directions and we headed out into the canal leading to the Great Bay and Fire Island. We edged toward the middle of the canal and promptly ran aground. Even though we were following the track we had taken in, the current low tide had left us with shallow water. We were stuck and we weren't even sure where to find deep water. A passing boat told us we had to stay all the way to the right of the canal. My move to the center wasn't such a great idea! A few minutes later, after several failed attempts to back down into deep water, a heavily powered fishing boat offered a pull and we were once again on our way.

A couple of hours later we were off Fire Island looking for the Inn. The directions had been pretty straightforward. Kismet Inn Marina is the most western marina east of the lighthouse. We edged closer to shore heading to what we thought was the Marina. It was a small bulkheaded marina with what looked from a distance like an impossibly small entrance. Intimidating signs warned that the marina was for guests of the Kismet Inn only! We crabbed closer to the opening in a wicked cross current as a hail from the dock asked if we were looking for a slip for the night. A quick "yes" and we were on our way in. The opening wasn't nearly as bad as it looked and the cross current eased quickly as we entered. We backed into the indicated slip and got lines

on the pilings. There were no finger piers and it took a bit of work to get us positioned stern to, with enough lines to hold us in place and still allow for the five foot tide.

The attendant had hopped on board and asked if we knew how the pricing worked. The yard guy had mentioned a great deal but hadn't been specific. The attendant spelled it out; overnight docking was \$125, but with that you got a \$100 credit for the bar and restaurant! Kind of hard to argue with that one.

Armed with our voucher we headed over the restaurant and took station at an outdoor table just as the band started up. We spent a thoroughly enjoyable five hours at the table having a few drinks, a great meal and listening to great music. According to our waitress it was a quiet evening, and she joined us at our table several times. A year-round resident of Fire Island and a high school teacher most of the year, she talked of the island and its inhabitants

The Inn serves as the evening gathering place for Kismet and was filled with kids, teens and adults of all ages. A small dance floor became increasingly packed as the band played. With the mix of ages a dancing couple was as likely to be a mom dancing with a young child as two adults or teens. It was like being at a big, very informal wedding reception. I now knew why the recommendation had been so enthusiastic!

The town of Kismet is accessible only by boat or ferry. It is laid out like any other town except there are no roads, only sidewalks. Biking and walking are the normal means of transportation (although we did see a Segway in use!). The beach is a short quarter mile walk across the Island. Unlike most barrier island communities I have seen, Fire Island is very green. Not in the environmental sense, but literally green with lots of vegetation. Even the lots in "town" are full of heavy brush and trees creating a quiet, intimate atmosphere. We all decided that this detour was well worth it and knew a return trip would be in the works. Had it not been for our engine trouble and the recommendation of the staff at the boat yard, we would never have found this place.

We headed out first thing Thursday morning (after a short delay for breakfast--the store didn't open until the ferry brought over fresh bagels, rolls and bread from the mainland), under overcast skies and a forecast of 10-15 knot winds out of the east. While we had no difficulty navigating our way to the inlet, we did have the interesting experience of watching ourselves cross what our chart plotter showed as solid ground. The sands, channels and markers shift frequently, but the channel is well marked. We worked our way back out to the "FI" alpha buoy, headed into the wind, hoisted our sails and

sail farewell to Fire Island. We will definitely be returning!

We expected a fairly easy downwind run toward Sandy Hook. The wind had been blowing out of the east for a couple of days, so there was a bit of a steep, confused seas running, but nothing really uncomfortable. We decided to head slightly off the direct course line toward Sandy Hook, keeping the wind off the quarter to keep all the sails filled and minimize the chance of an accidental jibe. We would jibe our way down to Sandy Hook in a series of long downwind "tacks."

Our plan was to stay at Sandy Hook Thursday night, hopefully meeting up with a couple of friends, Bob and Roberta Pulsch, for dinner. Bill and I are members of the American Schooner Association and had met Bob and Roberta at the previous association annual meeting and felt this would be a great way to get to know them better. I didn't have Bob's phone number but was able to get his email address from the ASA web site on my Blackberry and fired off an email. The marvels of modern technology!

We spent the rest of the day running toward Sandy Hook in increasing seas and winds. By mid-afternoon, apparent wind speed had built up to a consistent 15-18 knots. We were running under a main, foresail, staysail and jib in steep four to five foot seas. The wind and seas continued to build. We would get hit by a gust, and it wouldn't quit. We were consistently maintaining 7 knots of speed and occasionally hitting 8+ as we surfed down the front of waves. I thought it might be a good idea to put a reef in the main, and couldn't help but think of the old saying that if you are thinking about a reef, it is time to put one in.

We started the engine and headed up into the wind. The apparent wind jumped to the mid-twenties as we held the bow against wind and waves. The sails flogged wildly and the bow plunged into and through the waves as we got the sail reefed. Heading off the wind once again calmed things down. We ran for a while under reduced sail as the wind and seas continued to build.

Around fifteen miles out from Sandy Hook, I was thinking of reducing sail again. Apparent wind was consistently in the twenties and the wind and seas off our quarter were making it harder and harder to steer. We had too much weather helm. It was time to add another reef in the main. It looked as though the wind was going to continue to build, so I decided to furl the jib and foresail as well and sail under double reefed main and staysail. I have spent many hours sailing snugged down like that and knew it was the best option.

I clipped on the jackline and we headed into the wind. The sails started flogging wildly and the bow disappeared from view as we plunged into the waves. I carefully worked my way forward and pulled the furling line on the jib roller furler. It wouldn't move. I thought for a second the line was fouled, but it was clear. The jib sheets were flailing wildly, slamming into the staysail and foremast shrouds. The bow and bowsprit were alternately pointing toward the sky or buried under water. I put a harder strain on the line and the furler flipped the jib over a couple of times and then quickly doused the rest of the jib as the pressure on the sail eased.

I moved to the pin rail and released the halyards in preparation of lowering the foresail. The foresail was like a mad thing, flogging wildly. Add to this the sound of the staysail and main and it sounded like bedlam turned loose. A quote kept running through my mind, I believe it was by John Rousmaniere, to the effect that in situations like this you have to remember it is all just sound and fury, just noise,. The sail came down easily, quickly tamed with sail ties.

I moved aft to the mainsail reefing lines and saw a tangled mess at the end of the boom. The wildly whipping sail had fouled the reef line into a ball of tangled strands. The main boom on *Quintessence* overhangs the stern by several feet, so there was no way of untangling the mess. A second reef in the main wasn't going to happen. Discretion being the better part of valor, we dropped the main completely and headed off the wind under staysail and engine.

As before things calmed down immediately. With the staysail full and the engine ticking over around 1400 RPM's we were making 6 knots straight downwind toward Sandy Hook. The sail set well forward and the prop wash pouring across the rudder made steering easy for the first time all day. We saw very few other boats on the water until we sailed right into a couple of sailboat regattas out for a Thursday afternoon of racing. The boats were widely separated, but we still found it necessary to maneuver around a couple of boats, since we were now a power boat.

The wind and seas continued to build and soon we were surrounded by whitecaps. About an hour after dropping sail, ten miles from Sandy Hook, the engine quit again. A quick assessment revealed that at that moment, it didn't really matter. We were still moving along at six knots under staysail alone. Diagnosing the problem was out of the question. We were getting tossed around so much that trying to get into the engine compartment was just too dangerous. We would head into Sandy Hook under staysail and once around and in the lee of the Hook, we would try to figure out what was going on.

The seas and winds continued to build, but the two-hour run to Sandy Hook was pretty uneventful. Had we been trying to go upwind, it would have been a much different story. We reached around the Hook and sailed into calmer water. The winds still howled around us, but in the lee of Sandy Hook, the seas were calm..

Our plan was to anchor off the Coast Guard Station and as we came around the Hook, it became apparent that we weren't the only ones with the idea. Several other boats were already at anchor, included a fairly large schooner. We reached along and tried to head up into the wind to get closer to shore. It was soon obvious we couldn't make it under staysail alone and there was too much wind to hoist the single reefed main. They foresail would have to go back up. I had sailed *Quintessence* before under foresail and staysail and knew it would work Ok. The only problem would be the bow being blown downwind after each tack. We could head right back up again once she picked up speed.

We hoisted the foresail and began to tack upwind toward the beach and shallower water. I wanted to drop the anchor in 10-15' of water. My plow anchor is backed up with 50' of chain and 200' of line, but I wanted the best hold I could.

Bill and I both thought the schooner next to us looked very familiar, but were too busy to worry about it. It wasn't until a radio hail "*Merwald, Merwald, Merwald* calling the small green schooner tacking up to the coast guard station inside Sandy Hook" made us realize who she was. She was an old friend, the *A J Meerwald*, out of Bivalve, NJ. Bill has spent many hours as a volunteer shipwright on her, and several of *Quintessence*'s itinerant crew have volunteered on her over the years.

I grabbed the handheld and responded. Jesse Briggs, captain of the *Meerwald*, told us we looked great tacking upwind like that. I broke down and confessed that it wasn't by choice, but by lack of a working engine!

A short while later we had worked our way were well in shore and dropped anchor. Fifty feet of chain and another fifty of line would give us plenty of scope for our heavy plow. We cleaned up on deck and headed below. It was actually a bit of a shock heading below deck. We had been on deck all day in increasing winds and seas and the transition below was amazing. Close in shore, there were no waves at all. Bow into the wind, we were held rock solid against the anchor. For the first time in hours you could stand without hanging on!

I opened the engine compartment and checked the filter. It was full of water. No a drop of fuel in sight. I grabbed an

empty drink bottle and drained it. Water, water and more water. The fuel lines appeared to be full of water. I grabbed my cell phone and called Bill deRouville, who had been doing all the work on *Quintessence*. I explained what I was seeing. If I drained the fuel lines, would I be able to restart the engine? He thought it best to have his mechanic come up and take a look at everything.

I called TowboatUS for a tow. They suggested that we head for Atlantic Highlands Harbor, right across from where we were anchored. They would have to put us on a mooring though, since the office was closed until 0830 Saturday morning. I didn't see a point in going to a mooring so we decided to stay put for the night and head over in the morning. I let Bill deRouville know what was going on. The mechanic would be there late morning.

Bill and I stripped off our foul weather gear. Richard had already jumped into his sleeping bag. His foul weather gear hadn't worked out too well and he was chilled to the bone.

A thought occurred to me. We can cook! We can make some hot food!

"What do you guys want? Some coffee, soup?"

Soup it was to be. I opened a couple of cans of New England Clam chowder and dumped them into a pot. The propane stove on *Quintessence* is started with matches. I keep several of the long handled lighters used to start grills aboard to light the stove. I grabbed one from the storage shelf and tried to light it. No spark. It had gotten wet during the days run and wouldn't light. I grabbed the second one. Same problem. I grabbed the third one. This one was brand new. I had just put it on board. Same problem. No spark. No spark, no flame. No flame no stove. No stove, not hot soup.

"Bill, how about some cold soup?"

By then Richard had fallen asleep and fortunately, our laughter didn't wake him up.

We spent a relatively calm night at anchor. Repeated checks during the night showed we were not budging from the GPS position I had marked when we had anchored. Some time during the night we started rolling as the currents changed and we ended up lying at an angle to both the wind and the current. I found out next morning Bill had been rolled out of his berth and onto the deck. He was sleeping on the settee bench, so it wasn't that far a drop!

Saturday morning dawned clear, with greatly reduced winds. The *Meerwald* was gone, having departed at first

light. A call over to Atlantic Highlands Harbor got us a spot in the travel lift well for repairs. The tow boat arrived, and we headed over and tied up. I made a quick trip to the harbor office to take care of logistics.

When I got back to *Quintessence*, Bill was chatting with a guy at the dinghy dock across from us. When he had first seen us he had mistaken us for another green schooner he knew, *Green Dragon*. Bill and I know *Green Dragon* and her owner Al Bezanson well. We are both "members" of the "Small Green Schooner" chapter of the American Schooner Association. Al is commodore of the chapter, as he has a recipe for ginger cookies laced with rum. He let me join the chapter even though *Quintessence* isn't a real boat, since she is made of fiberglass, or as Al so enthusiastically calls in, frozen snot.

"Are you the guys Bob Pulsch was supposed to meet for dinner last night?"

"Yes we are."

"He was wondering what happened to you."

It really is a small world. Particularly the schooner world. He gave me Bob's number and I called Bob, apologizing for the no-show and seeing if he and Roberta were available for dinner later. They were and we made arrangements to meet at *Quintessence* around 1730.

The mechanic arrived and started working on the fuel problem. He drained the lines, manually pumped fuel back through them and bled the engine. We started the engine and let it run. No water. "Keep an eye on the filter on your way home" was the mechanic's comment. Seemed like good advice to me! Richard headed back with the mechanic to get home in time for his commitments for that evening and Bill and I got ready for dinner.

Bob and Roberta showed up as scheduled. We gave them a quick tour of *Quintessence* and we were off to a great dinner at the harbor. We talked about our trip, schooners, boats and anything else that came up. Bob started telling us about the 1901 B. B. Crowninshield catboat he was building when Roberta graciously invited us back to their house to see it. After dinner and a short ride we were in Bob's backyard boat shop admiring the beautiful job he was doing on the catboat. Bob is a true craftsman.

After a good nights sleep we left harbor and headed back out. Winds were light and variable with a forecast for 5-10 knot winds, out of the south. Of course, since we were heading south, the forecast was accurate this time. We motorsailed around Sandy Hook and along the shore until the wind had picked up enough to shut down the engine.

Bill and I settled down for a day of tacking south along the coast. Tack toward shore until we hit around thirty feet of water, than back offshore a couple of miles. Other than the direction, the winds were good. We even managed to get my new topsail hoisted!

We tacked along the coast until early afternoon. Our main goal on our trip south was to reach Manasquan early enough to avoid going through the Point Pleasant Canal against the worst of the ebb current, which I calculated would be around 1730. At our current speed made good, it would take half the night to get to Manasquan. Tacking in toward Asbury Park, the skies clouded over, the winds started getting very gusty and the beach disappeared in a haze. Flipping on the RADAR showed a large rain cell moving along the coast. We dropped our sails, leaving the foresail up in case the engine quit, and motored the rest of the way to Manasquan. We headed through to the inlet and toward the Canal. By then we had run the engine for several hours with no problems and no water showing up. Having the engine quit between the bridges on the Point Pleasant Canal would not be a pleasant experience.

As luck and (bad) timing would have it, we entered the Canal right around 1730, bucking a 3-4 knot ebbing current. We slowed to a crawl near the bridge abutments where the channel narrowed and the water accelerated. We didn't feel so bad, as a boat behind us couldn't stem the current at the Route 88 bridge, and had to turn around and wait for slacker water. A long hour after entering the Canal, we reached the northern end of Barnegat Bay and the last leg our trip.

Once again we motored through the shallows and as luck and more bad timing would have it we just missed the 1930 Route 37 Bridge opening. We sat turning in circles until the 2000 opening, made a quick run up Tom's River and tied up at deRouville's ending our journey.

A much different trip than planned. We never made it to Block Island. Didn't even make it to Montauk. But we found a great destination in Kismet, Fire Island. It was a real thrill meeting up with *Meerwald* at Sandy Hook and we had a great time with Bob and Roberta.

We pushed *Quintessence* through some tough weather. Checking the data buoy information during our run down to Sandy Hook after getting home showed "very steep" significant wave heights of 4-7'. There were sustained winds of 26-34 knots with gusts over 40. Not huge weather, but enough for a thorough shakedown of a 31' schooner.

Some changes we have made to *Quintessence* over the winter worked great. A cockpit instrument cluster we

built into the aft end of the cabin performed flawlessly. Others didn't work so well. Touch screens that work well in calm water are pretty useless in rough water when you can't hit the spot you are aiming for! We ruined some electronics, taking out our primary GPS, AIS receiver and main radio in one fell swoop as salt water made its way unto my newly laid out electronics board and wrecked a VHF splitter and NMEA multiplexer. We had found a few more leaks to fix.

I learned a bit more of how best to handle *Quintessence* under differing conditions and feel more confident in both my ability to handle *Quintessence*, and her ability to handle what I ask of her.

All and all a truly memorable trip.

Can't wait for the next one.