

Things Don't Always Go as Planned

Paul Gray, Schooner *Quintessence*

Things don't always go as planned. It is a fact of life. And even more so a fact of boating! You can spend hours meticulously planning routes and waypoints and evaluating tides and currents and one small thing can trash it all. A small thing like water in your diesel fuel for instance. Perhaps twice. On two different trips.

A trashed plan, however, does not necessarily lead to a trashed trip. Sometimes it leads to a pleasant surprise. Perhaps twice. On two different trips.

Let's just say, for example, you are sailing to Block Island from Barnegat Bay, NJ. You head out of Manasquan Inlet in nice winds. They are a bit more easterly than desired, but you have a wonderful day sailing north along the coast. Toward evening the winds die down, so you settle down for a night of motoring east along the south shore of Long Island. During the night, those east winds pick up with a vengeance, and you end up punching your way through increasing winds and waves. And then let's say, just for the sake of discussion, that around sunrise, just as your watch is ending, the engine starts running rough, white smoke starts pouring out of the exhaust and the engine quits.

Well that's where we were. Wallowing around in five to six foot seas off Fire Island, NY. We hoisted sail and hove to while we evaluated our options. In the current wind and sea conditions we wouldn't make much headway toward Montauk. Fire Island Inlet was more easily reachable, about ten miles downwind. I didn't know the inlet though, and had heard bad things about it. A quick call to Coast Guard Station Fire Island confirmed that I would have no trouble getting through the inlet and that a tow was available nearby. We headed downwind, called for a tow and a few hours later we were safely tied up in Bay Shore, NY waiting for a mechanic to take a look at the engine. Turns out a cracked fuel line fitting was letting air in the line, and we had, somehow, gotten quite a bit of seawater in our fuel tanks. A quick fix and new fuel and we were ready to go. But to where? At this point it was too late to continue to Block Island, or even Montauk. One of the guys at the yard made an emphatic recommendation: Kismet Inn on Fire Island. Great food, live music, the world's best gin

and tonics, and a great deal. How can you argue with that?

We headed over and tied up at the Inn. The recommendation was dead on. The food was wonderful. The music was great. I don't drink much of anything, but the Fire Island Ale was pretty good. And the deal? The overnight fee was \$125. With that you get a \$100 voucher for the restaurant. How can you argue with that!!

We spent a thoroughly enjoyable evening at Kismet Inn. So much so that we decided that we had to come back. Soon. Which led to our second adventure.

Let's just say, for example, you are heading for Fire Island, NY from Barnegat Bay, NJ, with a stopover at Sandy Hook, NJ. You leave Manasquan with winds out of the west-southwest and have a near-perfect day of sailing to Sandy Hook. The next morning you leave with great winds out of the northwest and have another near-perfect day of sailing along the south shore of Long Island. Towards late afternoon the winds die down, and you decide to motor the remaining few miles to Fire Island. You want to pass through the Inlet in daylight. And then let's say, just for the sake of discussion, your engine starts running rough and white smoke starts pouring out of the exhaust. Hopefully déjà vu kicks in, you check the Racor filter, find it full of water and shut the engine off before things get too bad.

Once again we found ourselves bobbing around off Long Island, this time off Jones Beach with no wind and calm seas. We drained the water out of the Racor, and watched it fill with clean fuel. Perhaps the engine would start? We tried, but no such luck. Now what?

We made a quick call for a tow, and as luck would have it, a boat was ten minutes away, right near the Jones Beach Inlet. A couple of hours later we were safely tied up in Freeport, NY. A quick call to my mechanic confirmed that the engine would eventually start. With shore power we didn't have to worry about killing the batteries. Eventually the engine started, ran rough for a while then smoothed out as the last of the water cleared the engine. We were all set for our run home to Barnegat Bay the next day.

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A recommendation by the tow boat captain led us to Freeport's "Nautical Mile." The waterfront area of Freeport sits along Woodcleft Canal, which is lined with restaurants, bars and casino boats. It was totally different than the wonderfully secluded Kismet Inn, but presented us with a world of choices. Take your pick! We had another great meal at the Riverhouse Grille, sitting at a street side table watching the cars and people wander by.

Another great find and another destination to return to.

So what was the deal with the fuel? It turns out that when heeled under sail, the transom fuel tank vents were a bit too close to the water. Water was entering them. Over the winter we had changed out the fuel vent lines when work being done on my boat revealed that the old ones, hidden behind a bulkhead, where collapsed and clogged. The new ones allowed the water to work its way back into the tanks.

As a simple fix, we moved the vent lines up onto deck, to snorkel-shaped vents attached to the back of the cockpit coaming. I have also installed a second Racor filter, with a built in water alarm. Two filters means I can keep the engine running as I drain any accumulated water.

That means, of course, I will never have that problem again and should complete my trips as planned. Which may mean missing out on some great unknown places.

At least, until something else breaks.

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