

## Fate

Was it meant to be? Who knew, who guided me to put the life jacket on?

It was a beautiful day with a moderate breeze that we headed out for the first sail of the year - the shakedown sail. Harold, a visiting cousin who knows nothing about boats, was my crew. In reality, he was just a guest along for the ride, and I was doing all the work.

I had worn life jackets but my inflatable had malfunctioned and I had not worn it last season. My daughter and son-in-law, John, bought me a new comfortable life jacket for Christmas. I promised to wear it sailing.

As we were about to leave the dock, I decided to put the life jacket on. Sure, it was a mild day, and I did not need it but decided, or was it decided for me, to wear it. Me? I think I was guided or told to wear it. It was a force greater than I, and one I was not aware of consciously.

The sail made all the weeks of work getting the boat ready worthwhile. Once the engine is shut off and you only hear the sounds of the wind and water on the hull and feel the motion of the boat going naturally through the water, you realize what an experience sailing is. Sailing is being one with the natural elements. It is using the power of the wind while, at the same time, not using it up as it still exists. For me it is most peaceful and relaxing.

The wind was light and it was time to go home. I decided to sail into the harbor. Once in the harbor the wind was so light I decided it was a good place, in spite of being crowded, to take down the sails. Harold took the wheel and I gave the orders as I lowered the sails. Once lowered, I was furling sails so we could then go to our dock. The one dangerous maneuver was to stand on the stern rail (back of the boat) and pull the sail taut by pulling back. I had done it hundreds of times.

It only took a split second. I cannot remember if I lost my grip, or if the sail pulled so quickly that I lost my balance. All I knew is that I was going overboard. From that split second until the time I hit the water was a

lifetime. Thoughts raced through my mind: I was not in the boat, Harold did not know how to run the boat, and how was I going to get back in the boat?

The water was very cold in that it was May in New England. Immediately, I realized the weight of all my clothes and how fortunate I was to have the life jacket on. Otherwise, I could have sunk with the weight of the clothes.

My second realization was that getting back on the boat was not going to be easy. Several attempts to pull myself up on a rope failed. Harold could not find the ladder below and I had to tell him how to run the boat and avoid other boats and moorings while swimming clear of the propeller. While he was looking for the ladder I was tying a ladder out of a rope.

We drifted close to the only other boat that had people on board, and I was able, with their help, to get on their swim platform. My boat was close enough that we could pull it closer with the line I was holding and I could get on board and take over.

As I took over (ever so thankful) I realized how much adrenaline had been pumping, and the fact that I was in shock. My heart took forever to slow down.

The landing at the dock, the first one of the year and on a new dock, was perfect. Once tied up, I was relieved.

I quickly adjusted the sails as needed, fixed the lines, and washed the boat and lifejacket with fresh water. Wet and cold, I had to get changed.

By this time I knew my wallet would dry out with the clothes. The cell phone was a different story. In the future, always leave the cell phone below deck with the wallet.

Yes Harold, we'll tell the truth as to what happened. There should never be any denying the truth. Once home we knew they knew. They had watched it all from the house. My wife had that look on her face I knew what she had said to herself. It was, 'if he lives through this, I am going to kill him!'

When did the fate part of this adventure start? When my daughter and son-in-law decided to give me a life jacket for Christmas? When I took it to the boat? When I put it on? All of the above? What about the choice to take the sails down in the harbor near a boat with people on board?

Things happen for a reason. This was a good thing. Other things appear to be bad things and, in the long run, we realize the value of them. To me, things do happen for a reason.

My wish is that you have read this for a reason and will wear your lifejacket, literally or figuratively, realizing always the need for preparation and safety in that which you do. Perhaps. When it is not needed, it is needed the most.