

WHY DO I KEEP DOING THIS?November 5, 2001Frank J. Andress

For those of you who are history buffs, today is Guy Fawkes Day, which marks a 1605 plot by a group of disgruntled Catholics to blow up the Houses of Parliament, arguably the first major terrorist act against the English government.

English school children recite a rhyme today:

Please to remember
The Fifth of November
Gunpowder, treason and plot
I see no reason why gunpowder and treason,
should ever be forgot.

I have added, and, in today's society we are painfully aware that they are not.

I enjoyed receiving the Literary Club's 150th anniversary publication at last week's annual meeting. In perusing it later that evening I became aware that perhaps I should not be speaking here tonight. On page 123 is a Catalogue of Members, Past & Present. Anderson, Anderson, Appleton, Aruig. . .lo and behold, no Andress is listed here. My anxiety was relieved, however, when I found a section Papers Read Before the Club and sure enough, my two earlier papers, Anti-Semitism: One Christian's View and Suicide Revisited were listed. It occurred to me that my omission was possibly due to the fact that the titles of my earlier papers were too literal and not in keeping with Literary Club tradition of obfuscation of appellations. I have attempted to correct this mistake with tonight's paper entitled, "Why Do I Keep Doing This". If my obfuscation is successful, perhaps when this publication is re-issued on the 200th anniversary of

the Club, my name will appear in the catalogue. I can hardly wait.

Thank you for the honor of appearing before this distinguished group of scholars. It is very rare that I have the opportunity to speak before such a large and intelligent gathering, especially for such a long time.

Growing up in the Midwest in the Depression, I never had an opportunity to sail a boat until the summer of 1951 when my wife and I were stewards for the E. Dennis Yacht Club on Cape Cod and I was bookkeeper for the Cape Playhouse and the Hyannis Music Circus. Really a fun summer. It was July. One of the members had a brand new Rhodes, a 19' sloop. He invited me to go on the maiden voyage. What a thrill, my very first sailing experience and a brand new boat! We headed west along the north shore of the Cape and encountered high winds and seas and soon turned over. We were being swept ashore when the skipper's brother came out in his family's new Lyman motorboat to rescue us. Unfortunately, when a sailboat turns over there are many lines, halyards and sheets in the water and soon one of them wrapped around the Lyman's propeller and stopped the engine. Now both the sailboat and the Lyman were being swept ashore, the two boats locked together by an umbilical-like cord and completely immobilized. As both boats were smashed by the surf, I thought, this must be one of life's expensive sports - two beautiful new boats seriously damaged on the same day. My reaction: this certainly is an exciting sport but I'll never be able to afford it!

Undaunted, my wife and I went to Bermuda the following year after my graduation. We stayed at the old Princess and each day I'd see the big cruise ships enter and leave the harbor through a narrow passage between large rocks. If those big cruise ships can get through, certainly I can in a much smaller sailboat and chartered a 20' sloop for the following day. What I failed to appreciate was that the wind blew hard, straight through the passage from dead ahead and it was

necessary to tack through, i.e., zig zag through (explain tacking) the pass. We could not go straight through as we had no engine. As I soon discovered to my dismay, wind and waves prevented us from coming about in the passage and we were being forced toward the rocks. Janet put her feet out to fend off and I headed the boat around the back side of the rocks, hopefully to safety. Unfortunately, in all the confusion of craggy outcroppings and smashing waves, I forgot to look up and see we were headed straight into the electrical lines which cross the harbor supported by poles atop the rocks. The wires plunge under the water at the passage to allow ships through the channel. But now they were right in our path since we were no longer in the channel. Soon sparks were flying all over the wet dock as our metal stays, or shrouds, tangled in the electric wires. I told Janet to jump over the side but as soon as her foot touched the water she experienced electric shocks and she was three months pregnant with our first child. She remained aboard. I looked up to see our 3/8" stainless steel shrouds on the port side burn completely through and come crashing down on the deck. The wooden mast bent like a wishbone under the pressure of the electrical lines since it no longer had support on that side. I thought surely the mast would snap, but instead, the mast held and the pressure of the electrical lines sprung the entire boat about 30' to starboard and safety. Miraculously, we were now disengaged from the wires. With the starboard shrouds still intact, we sailed several miles home on a starboard reach. The man who rented the boat to us was incredulous when he realized what had happened. I paid him for the damage and headed back to the Princess, a bit wiser and thankful we were both still alive.

Still undaunted, I was now determined to master ocean sailing as skipper of a live-aboard ocean going sailboat. But first, I decided to try it in the Great Lakes. A few years later we headed to Lake Erie. We chartered a 26' Triton for a long weekend, accompanied by the late Frank Cone and his lovely wife Katie Sikes.

After briefly running aground as we exited Sandusky harbor, we headed east. I'd always heard how treacherous Erie was because it is shallow, storms erupt quickly and waves can become very high.

We were about 30 miles east of Sandusky when Katie, who was looking aft, or west, said "Oh, look at that black sky to the north." I looked around and saw the blackest, most ominous sky I'd ever seen. It was about 20 miles northwest, heading southeast and would probably intersect our present easterly course. I concluded that if I immediately came about and headed west toward Sandusky, the storm would pass us to the north. Wrong! A few minutes later the storm hit us with its full fury and we still had our sails up! We started the engine, put on life jackets, battened down hatches, headed into the wind and took down the sails. While the main came down easily, the jib halyard would not release. Frank Cone, who was already weakened with seasickness, crawled up the fore deck with pliers, trying to release the jib halyard. Meanwhile, we had 13'-14' waves of solid green water breaking across the full length of the 26' boat and Frank would periodically disappear from sight. I was never sure if he'd survive successive waves but he clutched the mast and held on while simultaneously heaving over the side. The two girls and I were in the cockpit in water up to our knees as fresh waves exceeded the scupper drains' capacity. They were both stuffing candy bars down the front of their life jackets as I yelled to them through the howling wind and crashing waves to prepare to abandon ship. This continued for what seemed an eternity but probably was only 20 minutes. The motor kept running, I was able to keep her headed windward and Frank finally tore the jib down.

The wind finally abated, the sun came out and we felt we'd been delivered. We were soaked, the cockpit had 12" of water and all the interior, including our bedding, was soaked. But, we'd survived and I'd learned another lesson, the hard way. When faced with a severe storm, heave-to, head into it and take down

the sails immediately. Do not try to sail away from it as I did on Lake Erie.

Subsequent trips with our four children through the upper regions of Lake Michigan and the north channel of Lake Huron were uneventful and restored my confidence so I could now seek my long term goal of skippering an ocean-going sailboat of 50'. Many trips to the British Virgin Islands, Grenadines, St. Marten and Guadeloupe followed. One pleasant voyage was with Bruce and Bev Petrie in the Bahamas. Several were in the Windward Islands with Alex and Betty Stolley who share our love of sailing and owned a 40' sloop for several years. These were without serious incident except on two occasions.

In March of '87 we invited our two youngest daughters and their new husbands, one of who was an experienced sailor, to sail the Grenadines, referred to as the Windward Islands. At last I was skippering a 50' sloop - my original goal! The first day we left St. Vincent en route to Bequia but due to a late departure arrived there too late to get a secure anchorage. We dropped anchor but due to a grassy bottom the anchor would not dig in. As we drifted back with the wind, I realized we were going to collide with another large sailboat anchored downwind from us. While I could start the engine I feared I was so close to them I'd pick up his anchor line on my propeller. I put out bumpers and hailed the other boat regarding our predicament. Three couples from Birmingham appeared on the bow and, since it was cocktail hour, extended southern hospitality with invitations to come aboard for drinks, as we bore down on their chartered boat. Their skipper was less sanguine and tried desperately to fend us off.

Once the bumpers were in place it was agreed that I should start my engine and try to slowly pull forward. Wham! The engine stopped. I'd fouled their anchor rope around my propeller. My engine could not turn over and the two boats were locked together with

an umbilical-like cord. My anchor was finally holding but I'd severed their anchor line with my propeller. They depended on my propeller to keep them anchored.

It was now dusk and we were in an intolerable situation. I offered to dive below and cut their anchor line off my propeller but my family felt it was too dangerous. Besides, if I was successful, they'd be left without an anchor and could not remain in the harbor overnight. In fact, they couldn't anchor anywhere. Fortunately, a very wise, young native was watching all of this in silence from his little rowboat and offered to solve the problem for a modest \$100. (I'll bet he made a good living doing this for all of us part-time sailors.) I agreed. He dove down, found their severed line on the bottom, tied it to the other end and unwrapped the remaining part from my propeller. The skipper on the other boat naturally expected me to replace his new but now severed anchor line, which I obliged. This first day was a very costly experience. I'm not sure my two new son-in-laws were impressed with my anchoring prowess.

Friends have often asked about the challenges of sailing. I've replied that anchoring is the trickiest, especially in crowded harbors. If you don't get it right the first time and start drifting during the night you might drift into another boat or find yourself on the bottom and reanchoring at night is extremely hazardous if there are other boats nearby. Actual sailing and navigation, especially with the new GPS, is a snap.

January '83 was an experience without parallel. We decided January 2nd was a dreary day - holidays and football games were over and it's time to go back to work. Let's go sailing instead! And off we went to the BVI with three daughters and our only son-in-law at that time. We flew to Roadtown Tortola and chartered a 45' sloop from the Moorings. A snorkel/dive trip on the wreck of the Rhone was to be the highlight of the Moorings. The Rhone had sunk 40 or so years ago in

about 30' of water off of Salt Island. It is a favorite diving destination as its still intact hull sits serenely on the bottom while ubiquitous schools of blue, gold and silver fish swim casually in and out of portholes, across the bridge, and through old boilers. Jacques Cousteau, here we come!

I was enjoying the dive along with my wife, three daughters and about 10 strangers who'd accompanied us on the dive boat. My stomach was hurting and I had a fever, I thought probably the result of overindulging the night before at the Bitter End Yacht Club where we'd celebrated Janet's birthday. I terminated my dive early and got back onto the boat and immediately a searing, excruciating pain, the worst I'd ever experienced in my life, roared across my lower abdomen. Here I was, diving in the Caribbean, an hour's fast motorboat ride to the nearest native hospital in Roadtown, hundreds of miles from a substantial hospital in Puerto Rico and my appendix had ruptured. Janet alerted our skipper who said "No problem, I'll get John." "Who's John?" "John is an abdominal surgeon from California." Our skipper tugged on one of the dive lines, a mask appeared and Dr. John Watts quickly clambered aboard. He may have saved my life that day - praise the Lord for John! He immediately diagnosed the problem, put ice packs on my stomach and ordered the skipper to get everyone aboard and go at full speed to the native hospital in Roadtown, an hour away. To increase our speed, everyone and all dive gear were put onto nearby Salt Island, except for Dr. John, Janet and my youngest daughter Pamela.

As we arrived at the Roadtown Hospital, my confidence was undermined by several events. The ambulance driver was apparently drunk, so they sent an old station wagon full of muddy rubber tires to pick me up at the dock. The anesthesiologist was unavailable as he was having his Sunday sail. The razor used to shave my stomach was too dull to be effective. Dr. Smith, the attending physician, and all the staff and patients in this 19 bed hospital were black.

My concerns proved unfounded. They did a terrific job and a few hours later I was recovering in the six bed men's ward, where I could hear babies cry from the nearby maternity ward. My wife informed me that in our haste to depart the wreck of the Rhone we'd overlooked one diver who'd been left behind and showed up at the hospital that afternoon still in his dive outfit. What a sight! Can you imagine his surprise when he surfaced only to realize he was alone in the water and his chartered dive boat was busting the horizon heading toward Tortola. Fortunately, he was able to swim to Salt Island and was later rescued and eventually found us at the hospital.

The next week of recovery was fascinating. One of my fellow patients was a young native, tall, slender and recovering from a stab wound in his stomach. One morning a young woman came in, stood by his bed and screamed and yelled at him. When she'd left, I learned she was his wife. "Why," I asked, "was she so angry?" "Because it was my girlfriend that stabbed me," he replied. My, how narrow minded that wife was!

One morning, a little old man walked into the ward, fully clothes, sat down and took off all his clothes and crawled into the adjacent bed without any attendant or nurse nearby. The nurse later explained that there was no monetary retirement for retired seamen in the BVI but there were allowed to enter the hospital, crawl into bed and be fed whenever they wished. What happens, I thought, when all six beds in the men's ward are occupied by retired seamen?

Meanwhile, they discovered an embolism, or blood clot, in my lung and the attending physician, I learned later, had removed the drain tubes from my stomach too soon. Peritonitis set in and my bowels paralyzed. I swelled up like a balloon due to internal gas buildup. I looked like I was eight months' pregnant. Dr. Smith was unable to relieve the gas built-up and was concerned the embolism would break loose and go to my heart, which might prove fatal. It was the middle of

the night when he put me into an oxygen tent and summoned my wife from a nearby hotel and the local Baptist minister. When the minister, a young black man dressed all in white, appeared at my bedside and began reciting the 23rd Psalm, especially the part about "yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death", I realized I was much sicker than I had thought. The Good Lord must have heard our prayers. During the night the bowels opened naturally and the crisis passed by about 3 AM.

The next morning I groggily awoke to see the Aunt Jemima look-a-like cleaning lady standing alongside. When I told her I'd had a rough night she said loudly, "From what I heard you should be down on your knees praying to the Lord and thanking him you are still alive!" She was right and I did just that.

Throughout this ordeal my regular physician at the time, Clay Sikes, who is here tonight, was in daily phone contact with Dr. Smith. Clay even offered to fly down there and his counsel to Dr. Smith was of immense help. Unfortunately, Dr. Smith removed the drain tubes without discussing it with Clay.

My initial concerns about this little native hospital proved to have some validity. However, it was a fascinating experience with gracious, caring people and the final results were good! When the bill arrived at the end of my week's stay, I was shocked. It was only \$320 for everything, surgery included! They refused to accept any more so I gave them \$400 for a new TV set since the hospital had none. I put the \$400 extra on my Blue Cross submission after returning home and labeled it "TIP". Blue Cross paid it without question.

By now, the title of this paper should be clear. After all these harrowing sailing experiences you might ask "Why Do I Keep Doing This?" Let me tell you. Sailing anywhere, but especially in the Caribbean, is one of life's greatest thrills. To wake up each

morning in an isolated harbor lined with sandy beaches and palm trees and dive off your boat into about 15' clear blue 75 degree water is the ultimate waker-upper. After breakfast out on the deck you start the engine, weigh anchor and head off toward some distant island barely visible on the horizon. You've never seen your destination before. Adventure abounds! Initially the silence is broken by a noisy chugging diesel engine. But once you clear the harbor, hoist the sails and shut down the engine, all you hear is the rapture of wind through the rigging, waves breaking beneath the bow and blue sky and azure water as far as you can see.

Once we were sailing southeast of the BVI driven by the trade winds emanating all the way from Africa. The rollers, driven by thousands of miles of open water were 25' high. But they were not threatening since they were breaking only moderately at their crest. We'd look up from below at these towering waves with spray spewing off their peak. We'd sail up the 25'-30' wave to the very top, then peer down the other side and descend to the very trough, only to be lifted again to new heights on successive waves much like an immense roller coaster powered by the wind. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Wind, temperature and waves were pure ecstasy.

One of the most rapturous places to anchor is the Tobago Cays in the Grenadines. One February evening we were anchored behind Tobago reef, facing east, warmed by soft trade winds. A full moon was rising out of the Atlantic ocean in front of us while a glowing sun was setting behind us in the Caribbean. We rested in calm, protected waters just behind the reef but could hear that wonderful surging sound of breaking surf over a few yards in front of us. Nearby was another sailboat with two attractive, topless young women in orange bikinis resting on the bow. Truly sublime.

Or, sailing east along the north side of Tortola with immense crashing waves colliding with 75' cliffs

and water spraying high into the sky. Now perhaps you can understand "Why I Keep Doing This?"

The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner has many references reminiscent of past sailing experiences. While anchored serenely behind the reef at the Tobago Cays at sunset I read:

The sun came up upon the left,
 Out of the sea came he!
 And he shone bright, and on the right
 Went down into the sea.
 The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
 So smoothly it was strewn!
 And on the bay the moonlight lay,
 And the shadow of the Moon.
 The moving Moon went up the sky,
 And nowhere did abide;
 Softly she was going up,
 And a star of two bedside -

or fighting the storms of Lake Erie:

"And now the Storm-blast came, and he
 Was tyrannous and strong;
 He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
 And chased us south along.
 With sloping masts and dipping prow,
 As who pursued with yell and blow
 Still treads the shadow of his foe
 And forward bends his head,
 The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
 And southward aye we fled.
 And the coming wind did roar more loud,
 And the sails did sigh like sedge;
 And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
 The Moon was at its edge."

in parting, let me cite a book by Richard Bode which was loaned to me by Tom York, one of my guests tonight. Bode was a lifelong sailor who shares my love

for the sport. His book is entitled First You Have to Row a Little Boat. He writes:

"Here a man discovers that he and his rowboat have become one. As he sails the seas so must he sail his moods. . .that in a capricious universe where thick fog is as prevalent as a fair breeze he must make keen choices to reach a safe haven. . .that there is a right way to catch the wind, to survive its sudden, potentially disastrous shifts with personal liberty triumphant. Thus the young man learns that to fathom the elements is to achieve mastery over oneself. To sail a boat is to negotiate a life."