

## The Best and Worst of Times

by Joanne Albano

When my husband, Joe, and I returned to our home port in Stonington from our sailing vacation this year we faced the inevitable question from our neighbors on the dock, "How was your trip?"

Simple enough, but we had so much to tell! Do they really want to know or are they asking to make polite conversation? Testing the waters, we would simply reply, "It was great." In truth we could sit for hours and recount all the events. But we saved those stories for our closest friends.



In fact we really did have a great time! This was the first time in our ten years of sailing together that we had sailed with a large group, @ 20 boats. This was our third season with *mystic sea*, our Catalina 36mkII. We had joined Fleet 5 and attended fall and winter meetings. When we found out the group's destination this year was Provincetown we were eager to check our calendar. No weddings. No graduations. We could do this trip!

By July 8, Fleet 5 had gathered at Watch Hill. *mystic sea* was docked up-river and so decided we didn't need to anchor at Napatree. Rather we offered "cab" service to town or to pick up supplies if needed. Some did take us up on the offer, which in turn gave us dinghy transportation to the first event of the trip, a cocktail party for about forty people aboard a trawler. Crowded together for cocktails and drinks we had our first glimpse of what it was going to be like to travel with this

group. Sunday night was barbeque on the beach. We knew we had made the right decision.

Monday morning our journey to Provincetown began. We left Napatree, ducklings all in a row, headed for Dutch Harbor. Subsequently stopping at Cuttyhunk, Onset, Provincetown, back to Onset, Westport and Newport. What followed at each port were successive cocktail parties, small and large, barbeques, lobster dinners, whale watches, and even a wine pairing dinner, the details of all I'm sure will be recounted and reinvented at future Fleet 5 meetings. We found out that we were part of a very special group. Because some of the get-togethers were small and intimate, we got to know everyone. Each member brought his or her own uniqueness to the group, and yet the members were united when safety was an issue and in having a good time.





However, we had the worst weather we had ever encountered. We sailed through more fog and experienced more thunder storms than we would like to imagine. We endured fog, rain, thunder and lightening, more fog. We even had to skirt a tropical storm named Beryl. Not every ship was equipped with radar so those that did literally looked out for those who did not. Crossing Cape Cod Bay two boats experienced engine difficulty and others were willing to hang back until they were up and running again. An intense storm cell with thunder and lightening and winds at nearly 60 mph passed over the mooring field in Westport one night causing

damage to some boats in the fleet. It was midnight, and yet when it had passed everyone was on the radio checking to see that everyone else was all right. Joe and I found the camaraderie comforting.

After Westport the fleet split up. Some headed to Stonington, a stop on their way home, others went to Block Island. *mystic sea* headed to Newport, where it turned out we were safe from Beryl.

Our intended day for departure home was Saturday, and guess what NOAA was forecasting? You guessed it, fog and thunder storms. We woke up Friday morning and saw blue sky and said, "Let's go!"

NOAA was right! Saturday and Sunday were stormy, so we were pleased with our decision to head home Friday. We were also happy with our decision to have sailed with Fleet 5! We know we can't control the weather, but the weather does not have to deter us from making new friends and having a great time! Our memories are a wonderful thing. The bad times will fade with time and the good times will seem better with time's passage.

