

THE GREAT LOOP – 2002 CRUISE

Saturday, April 6, 2002 and we're off. Off to where, you ask? We have a two year plan, and we put it out there for all to point at if we don't make it. This year, we plan to cruise up the ICW to New York City; up the Hudson River, through the Erie Canal to Oswego; NY on Lake Ontario; through the Rideau Canal to Ottawa, Canada; to Montreal; to Quebec; through the Richleau Canal to Lake Champlain; back to the Chesapeake Bay to winter in Washington, DC. Next year we plan to retrace our steps to Oswego, NY and go NW through the Trent Severn Waterway to Georgian Bay to cruise the Georgian Bay/North Channel; later down Lake Michigan to Chicago; through the Chicago River, Illinois River, Mississippi River, Ohio River, Tennessee River, Tombigbee River to Mobile, Alabama; winter in Florida and complete the loop to Beaufort in July 2004. That's a mouthful.

Our short term plan is to stop in Georgetown, SC to visit with Butch's niece, Wilmington, NC to visit Lynne's aunt and uncle and to pick up crew (the Berry's who were with us in the Keys), and in New Bern, NC for a couple of weeks so Butch can finish his working obligations.

But first, let's have a party. We were in Beaufort for nine months and made many good friends there. Before we can leave, our friends wanted to have a party. It's not that we're that important. It's just that they'll use any excuse to have a party. So, we had a Friday night party. Coincidentally, some of our good cruising friends happen to be cruising by Beaufort at that time, and one couple, Gordon and Mary Lou from Edgewater, MD, aboard "Aquarius" got there just in time for the party. A great time was had my all, but being the old-farts that we are, we went to bed early so we could get off on Saturday.

Saturday, we were off to the hoots and hollers of the Beaufort crew and joined our good friends, Chris and Alyse aboard Sandy Hook (another Gulfstar 44). We met in Myrtle Beach last year and have cruised together several times, and they just happened to be passing by on their way from Florida to Baltimore – at exactly the moment we left the dock. It was nice to have them to travel with for a few days. Note – we got away from Beaufort without hitting a single boat.

For those of you interested in the numbers, here's what we did in this phase.

Date	Stop	Miles traveled	Time Traveled
4/6	Steamboat Landing (mile 497)	43	5 hours
4/7	Whiteside Creek (mile 452)	47	6
4/8	Georgetown (mile 403)	49	5.5
4/10	Barefoot Landing (mile 354)	52	5.5
4/11	Southport (mile 309)	45	5.5
4/12	Wilmington	25	3
4/15	Mile Hammock Bay (mile 245)	68	9
4/16	Beaufort (mile 204)	50	6
4/18	New Bern, NC	47	5

Our first two stops were dictated by Fred, a golden retriever who is acting Admiral of Sandy Hook. Chris and Alyse are both licensed captains, but since Fred is in charge, he must be the Admiral. As they cruise the waterways, their anchorages are primarily influenced by the presence of dog “facilities”. Actually, all Fred needs is a shoreline he’s allowed to touch while he does his “business”.

This leg of our trip was uneventful – meaning that the “cruising gods” were saving all our adversity for later. In Georgetown, we stayed at the local marina and met Butch’s niece, Ryan and her fiancé. His family has a beach house nearby and we went there for breakfast. It’s a really nice house. We have to get to know him better. I’m sure there’s plenty of room for us to live there. We also met up with Gordon and Mary Lou aboard “Aquarius” again.

Wilmington, NC was a new stop for us, and it’s a great stop for cruisers, by the way. The Marina situation has changed recently. The local marina is now operated by the city and they are trying very hard to make their stop a first class stop for cruisers. The dock is no longer free, but it’s still reasonable and the nearby hotels extend their hospitality to crews of boats using the city’s slips. The city is vibrant and fun to visit. They have a vibrant nightlife, but not obtrusive; great restaurants. The new dockmaster was wonderful. We asked him where we could get some fresh shrimp and he drove us to the best seafood store in town. He was always around in case we needed him. It was a great stop.

In Wilmington, we were joined by old friends Kent and Suzie Berry. If you’ve been reading along you will recognize them as the couple that brings us bad weather and bad luck. In this case, they tried a new twist. Weather and luck were all good WHILE THEY WERE THERE. BUT, they somehow arranged to leave the bad luck hidden around the boat to jump up and bite us “you know were”. Stay tuned.

The trip to New Bern was fun. We love having company on board. The boat is performing perfectly. Everything’s working – the engines, the generator, the inverter, the heads, the charging systems. No problems anchoring. No problems docking. What a boring trip so far. Stay tuned. The WEEK FROM HELL is just around the corner.

NEW BERN TO ANNAPOLIS

Now this is suppose to be another boring leg. We’re retracing old ground. The only thing we’ve added is to spend a couple of days in Norfolk since we didn’t stop there on our way south in October 2000. We even plan to use the same anchorages along the way. So here goes.

Wednesday, May 8 we left New Bern midmorning and made 54 miles to Campbell Creek at ICW mile 155. This was the place we had our first grounding on our way south a year and a half ago. That time I wasn’t paying attention. This time I did. No story here. Just a quiet night on the hook and on the next day to an anchorage on the Alligator River (mile 102). Again, just a quiet night on the hook as we make our way to our Norfolk stop. Does this seem like the calm before the storm.

Friday morning, we left at the civilized hour of 945am and proceeded north. Tonight we plan to anchor somewhere near Coinjock, NC and finish the trip to Norfolk on Saturday.

FLASH! FLASH! THE GODS HAVE DESCENDED UPON US! NO MORE WILL WE CRUISE ALONG IN IGNORANT BLISS. PROCEED TO THE WEEK FROM HELL TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS TO THIS HAPLESS COUPLE.

THE WEEK FROM HELL

So, you think cruising is relaxing. Much of the time it is, I suppose, but occasionally you experience THE WEEK FROM HELL. This is what happened to our heroes – Butch and Lynne.

THE WEEK FROM HELL began as our heroes were quietly motoring across the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina, looking forward to a “relaxing” visit in Norfolk just 2 days away. As they were having a sandwich, “Hero Lynne” noticed the bilge pump light come on. It ran for a few seconds, then turned off, then on, then off. After three on’s and off’s in just a few minutes, “Hero Butch” decided that checking the bilge was a little more important than eating a sandwich. This marks the actual start of THE WEEK FROM HELL.

“Down into the bilge we go. And what do we find? Well, it’s a little dark in here, but you could see water pouring into the bilge from the area of the port shaft. Damn! We’re sinking! Just what we need. And my buddy from Sandy Hook told me to watch out for the hoses around the shaft logs. Can’t exactly see the leak, but feeling around the shaft doesn’t help. Wait! The water is coming from somewhere else. There it is. It’s a fitting to the aft shower. Thank goodness. We’re just losing all our fresh water into the bilge. Quickly and adroitly our hero leaps out of the bilge and turns off the fresh water pump. Now back into the bilge to find out why it’s so dark down there – and hot.” It’s so hot, the handholds on the ladder are hard to grip without burning “Hero Butch’s” hands. Suddenly, the 110 volt trouble light just went off. But, damn, there’s enough light to see what the problem is. The port exhaust is pouring into the engine room through a gaping hole in the exhaust hose. Our heroes’ problems begin.

All is not lost, our heroes have two engines. Kill one, run off the other, fix the leak well enough to use the port engine for docking and go from there. But the troubles are just beginning. It got hot down there. Hot enough to soften a plastic pipe fitting and pop it apart. That’s what happened to the aft shower fitting. Why was it so hot? Because hot exhaust and superheated steam were spewing all over. And why did the 110 volt trouble light go out? It was fine. Our \$1500 inverter was not. It had quit and there was a troubling error message flashing from the controller. It said something like, “I’m not working, I’m not working, and I’m not going to work until you find out why I’m not working and fix me. Nanner, Nanner, Nanner!!” At least, that’s what it sounded like. At least the generator worked.

Now it’s time for our heroes to rise to the occasion. After a good cry, plans to anchor out are forgotten and a marina in Coinjock, NC is called for assistance getting a new exhaust hose. Midway Marina in Coinjock was a godsend to our heroes. They ordered in a hose from a Norfolk Marina, 30 miles away, and found a local mechanic to help install it. They provided the hose at their cost and the local mechanic tried to get away for no charge.

Our heroes limped in to Midway, and began to assess the damage. First off, the engine room was like a black hole. No light reflected from any surface. It was awful. “Hero Butch” spent the entire next day just cleaning. The cleaning helped some. But also, things began to go wrong. “Hero Butch” managed to cap off the shower fitting that had started THE WEEK FROM HELL, and changed to a different water tank, but shortly after getting settled in Coinjock, “Hero Lynne” noticed that the new tank was suddenly empty. Back into the bilge goes “Hero Butch” and finds another fitting popped loose, pouring water into the bilge. A screwdriver fixes that, but what next? Our heroes need another good cry. Here’s a listing of what was discovered on day two of THE WEEK FROM HELL and how our heroes dealt with it:

Busted water fittings – lost a bunch of water, but no big deal. Repaired them so they cannot break again in the future.

Collapsed hose on aft head – The Vacuflush heads use a vacuum to operate. The hose softened and collapsed. Fortunately, the boat has a second head, because it was several days before the parts arrived to fix it.

Collapsed hose on the macerator – This hose softened and collapsed, but fortunately, the macerator isn’t used often, so no immediate inconvenience resulted.

Shorted Inverter – “Hero Butch” took the cover off the inverter and emptied a can of electrical parts cleaner on the circuits inside. All kinds of black disgusting crap came out. Then the inverter worked fine. Yeah!

Collapsed hose on the holding tank vent – That was discovered when the pump out didn’t seem to work. Without a vent hose, the dockside pumpout vacuum is strong enough to collapse the tank. It did. The tank is a little out of shape, but let’s hope it wasn’t damaged beyond use.

Bilge Pump – Both the main bilge pump and the backup failed this day. Turned out to be unrelated to the “incident”, but irritating nonetheless.

Things are beginning to look up. One extra day in Coinjock has allowed our heroes to catalogue the damage and order parts, fittings, etc. to be delivered to Norfolk. But the nagging question is, “why did the hose fail?”. To get the full impact of THE WEEK FROM HELL, we have to go back a few months.

FLASHBACK

Our story really began in Boca Grande, Florida in March 2001. Aisling ran aground (notice that boats run aground, Captains don’t). It took several minutes to wiggle loose. After that time, the port engine began to run a little hot. In fact, the next 3 months seemed to be a continuing exercise in trouble-shooting the cooling system on that engine as it became increasingly apparent that there was insufficient flow in the seawater side of the port engine cooling system. Our hero tried everything he could, short of dismantling the whole thing. At each stop, he checked a different engine component and usually found something that might have been the cause, but it

never seemed to be the correct fix. By the time Aisling reached Beaufort, SC where she would rest for a few months, the port engine was effectively shut down.

But our hero was not to be deterred. While stopped in Beaufort, he removed every component related to seawater flow and had it cleaned. One of the components removed and cleaned was the exhaust elbow. Now this is an interesting animal. The exhaust elbow has two parts. The inner part carries exhaust gases from the engine. The outer part carries cooling water. They join at the outlet of the elbow. Apparently, the water shoots out small holes around the perimeter of the opening and cools the exhaust. Remember this fact. It's important.

In the end, the cooling water flow had improved dramatically, and our hero declared victory and moved on to the next problem.

The following spring, on the first trip from the Beaufort Marina since the repairs, the exhaust hose failed. That's another story. Anyway, our hero chalked that up to the abuse of running on low water in Florida, replaced the hose and left Beaufort for the RELAXING cruise north. Next came Albemarle Sound and THE WEEK FROM HELL.

FLASH FORWARD

So, we know what the problem is. "Hero Butch" insisted on being a mechanic – which he isn't – and fix the original flow problem himself. Let's fire that incompetent bastard and hire a real mechanic to fix this once and for all. Our heroes made a reservation at a new Marina in Norfolk that promised a consultation with a mechanic to, at least, diagnose the port engine cooling problems. So, on day three of THE WEEK FROM HELL, our heroes are off to Norfolk, 50 miles away, hoping for NO NEW PROBLEMS.

WRONG!!. Two hours out of Coinjock, it became obvious that the exhaust on the port engine was running abnormally hot and that engine had to be shut down and reserved for "special occasions" like docking in Norfolk. But wait, during one of his many trips to the engine room, "Hero Butch" noticed something strange from the battery monitor. Hmm! The batteries are not getting charged by the alternator. Our hero isn't even a little bit interested in troubleshooting that problem. He's been fired as ships mechanic, anyway.

On day four of THE WEEK FROM HELL, our heroes finally got to speak with a mechanic – actually the mechanic supervisor. But not until they waited 6 hours for him to come. The mechanic and the heroes agreed to install a new seawater pump (that's the only component our incompetent mechanic didn't address in Beaufort). He also promised to send a mechanic over the next day to check out the alternator. Meanwhile, our good friends Don and Violet Waldecker came by with fittings to repair our collapsed hoses and new float switches for our bilge pumps. "Hero Butch" spent another day in the bilge fixing things.

On day five of THE WEEK FROM HELL, the mechanic confirmed that the alternator wasn't working so he removed it and sent it to be rebuilt. Maybe it'll come back today, maybe tomorrow. With nothing left to do, our heroes decided to do some sightseeing.

On day six of THE WEEK FROM HELL, the mechanic installed the new water pump and ran the port engine. He was convinced the water flow has improved. Our hero wasn't so sure. He suggested they look at the two engine exhausts together, but they couldn't because the alternator still hasn't been returned. We don't want to run the starboard engine without its alternator so we agreed to wait. Our heroes decide to go to a movie.

On day seven of THE WEEK FROM HELL, our heroes spend the entire day sightseeing, and it was fun, but there's still this nagging concern about the port engine. "Hero Butch" is certain it isn't fixed, yet. What to do, what to do. Meanwhile, the alternator arrived and the mechanic put it in. Our heroes return to the boat as he is leaving for the day. The alternator still isn't working and he confirmed that the port engine still isn't putting out enough water. He agrees to return the following morning.

Aside from the nagging doubts about the engine, our heroes were also anxious to get on our way. We had hoped to spend some time in Annapolis visiting our friends, and that time is getting eaten away while struggling with these problems. And by the way, the aft head isn't working right.

On day eight of THE WEEK FROM HELL (You might think a week has seven days, but not THE WEEK FROM HELL) the mechanic arrived as promised and had a crazy idea. It looked like there was a slight angle between the exhaust elbow and the exhaust pipe. Is it possible that this is pinching off and redirecting the water flow just enough to overheat the hose? Eureka! That was the problem. He twisted the elbow just a few degrees and went aft to admire the dramatic increase in water flow. That's one problem solved. Now what of the alternator. My good friend, Don, faxed the manufacturer's instructions for testing the alternator/regulator combination and the tests confirmed that the regulator was also bad. So, it cost \$350 to rebuild a \$450 alternator and another \$250 to replace the regulator. Since our heroes were anxious to leave, they arrange for the regulator to be shipped to Annapolis.

Our heroes had hoped to leave on day eight, but it was getting late and the boat needed cleaning after eight days of greasy engine work so they decided to clean and leave tomorrow. There's a front coming through, but it should be gone by morning and the weather forecast is promising.

WRONG! Day nine was terrible. Our heroes were stranded and getting tired of being there. Not that the people at Ocean Marine were not real nice. They were. They stopped charging for dockage after the fourth day. They had a courtesy car for shopping. And the mechanics did fix the port engine. On day nine our heroes went to another movie.

Finally, on day ten our heroes are off. The weather forecast is good and they plan to leave early, early, early and make Solomon's 110 miles away. NOT! The Chesapeake Bay was the worst they ever saw. Needless to say, our heroes did not make it to Solomon's that day. They stopped way short in Mobjack Bay to lick their wounds and have another cry.

The following day, dawn gave clear skies, low winds and small waves. Our heroes made it to Solomon's that day and Annapolis the following day. Thus ending THE WEEK FROM HELL.

ANNAPOLIS AND BEYOND

We hoped to have a nice stay in Annapolis, visiting friends and old favorite cruising spots. Instead, we had 10 days of mostly doing repairs. Fortunately, we found a great haven at a close friend's dock where we could have easy access to supplies and moral support. Our friends, the Schumachers have helped us out before and they were a godsend to us now.

The new regulator arrived, and on the first day, we installed it. IT DIDN'T WORK!! So I took the alternator and regulator off and took them to a local shop – remember, I was fired as ship's mechanic. \$195 later, things were no better. More frustrations.

And the head still doesn't work right. The Vacuflush heads work by maintaining a vacuum in the vacuum generator tank. When you flush, the vacuum evacuates the bowl and the pump is engaged to pump the stuff into the holding tank and reinstitute the vacuum. Our problem is a vacuum leak. The pump turns on every 25 minutes. Not good. It should be an easy fix, but no. There are several sources of leakage and it took several weeks to finally track down the problem. Damn.

Still, our stay in Annapolis wasn't without some fun. We helped our friends do some chores at their house, spent a couple of days moored downtown. Dinner with more friends. Two days in Baltimore with Admiral Fred and his two Captains, Chris and Alyse.

Finally, on Monday, June 3, we were off to points north. Day one was easy enough. Baltimore to the C & D Canal. 53 miles in a little over 5 hours and a nice anchorage for the night. Day two wasn't so good. The forecast was for winds of 10 to 15 and waves 2 feet on the Delaware Bay. Not so. Once we passed the point of no return it got nasty. We were supposed to go to Lewes, Delaware to meet our friend Bill Tarpenning who volunteered to do the New Jersey passage with us, but with the heavy seas right on our nose, we had to abort that plan and make way to Cape May instead. No problem, Bill agreed to take the ferry to Cape May the next morning and we can leave when he arrives.

I think THE WEEK FROM HELL is still with us, or at least we're suffering aftershocks. Bill called us early the next morning to tell us he was on the ferry. Shortly thereafter, as I was doing my morning routine in the engine room, I discovered an exhaust leak on the port engine that traced to a rotted elbow. The new part was \$800 and two days away. So when Bill trotted down the path, I got to tell him he came for nothing. The worst is yet to come. When Bill arrived on the boat, the first thing I did was remove the engine hatch so I could show him my newest problem. The first thing he did was turn to hug my wife. The hatch was between them. Guess where Bill ended up. WRONG! Only half of him fell in the hole. When all was said and done, poor Bill had a twisted knee and badly bruised ankle. It would be several weeks before Bill would be able to walk normally. THE WEEK FROM HELL continues.

We were stranded in Cape May for the weekend waiting for decent weather. Not the worst place to be stranded. Our first exposure to New Jersey was delightful. It's a pretty town with lots to do and the people were really friendly – not like we'd been trained to expect from New Jersey. The marina, Utch's, is family run and very accommodating to our needs. Since we were there for several days, we had a pretty good chance to get to know the city. Cape May was one of the

first beach resorts in the country. Their heyday was around the turn of the century. The result is a panacea of Victorian architecture. Lately, they have worked hard to retain that identity by restoring some of the finer buildings. Now, they seem to have hundreds of beautiful Victorian B&B's. AND THEY WERE ALL FULL. So there you have it.

We kept considering taking the inside route most of the way, but the water there is shallow and there were too many conflicting reports about the ability of a boat of our draft, 4 ½ feet, to complete the inside trip. We struggled with the decision, but the clincher was the fact that even after taking the inside as far as you can, you still have to do the last 30 miles on the outside (i.e. Atlantic Ocean). We decided that if we could get a good day, we'd just do the whole thing (138 statute miles) at once. That's what we did, on Sunday, June 9, off we went. After all that worry, the Atlantic Ocean was much more cooperative than either the lower Chesapeake Bay or the lower Delaware Bay. It was a little breezy and we had some 2-3 foot waves on our beam and aft quarter, but they were rolling with a long period and once we got into the rhythm we did fine for the 14 hour passage. Lynne was a real trooper. We left at 5 am; watched the sunrise on the Atlantic Ocean; arrived at Sandy Hook at 6:30 that evening; and anchored in the shadow of the Coast Guard station there.

THE WEEK FROM HELL is still with us. The alternator is definitely not working and the aft head still won't hold a vacuum. Every few days I replace a part, hoping that will be the one. Monday morning we left Sandy Hook bound for New York City. From Sandy Hook you can see the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, but only a hint of the NY skyline. As we passed under the bridge, the NY skyline opened up before us and we were awed – not only for the magnificence of it but also for the missing piece. As we cruised past the World Trade Center, we were struck by the sight of the damaged buildings near the Towers and we could see the hole in the skyline.

We had planned to stay in New York for a few days, but the stresses of the past few weeks were working on us and when we reached the frenzy of the New York harbor, we both agreed that we just were not in the mood to deal with the big city. Instead, we headed up the Hudson River and before you know it, we were out of the city and in the countryside. It was amazing. As big as New York City is, we only had to travel 12 miles up river to the George Washington Bridge to leave it behind us. We went as far as Nyack, NY. If you look on a map of New York State, you'll swear that Nyack is part of the city. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nyack is a tiny little New York town in the part of New York known as "upstate". I always thought "Upstate New York" was way north towards Canada. Once again, this poor ignorant southern boy was wrong. As we've learned, New York State consists of at least 4 different parts. There's New York City, a foreign country really; Upstate NY, which consists primarily of the Hudson River Valley to Albany; Northern NY, mostly the Adirondacks; and Western NY. All of New York State, outside of NYC, is rural, just like the rest of America. The people are friendly, simple and normal. More on this later. Our next segment will cover our trip through New York State.

NEW YORK STATE

What a surprise New York State turned out to be. We've never heard much about the state, either from a boating perspective or any other for that matter – except for New York City. In fact, one might imagine that the best thing to do is get through the state as quickly as possible so you can enjoy more time at your other destinations. If you choose to do so, you can get from Sandy Hook, NJ to Oswego, NY at the Lake Ontario end of the Erie Canal in 7-8 days. Three days to make the 175 miles up the Hudson, and 5 days to make the 200 miles and 30 locks of the Erie and Oswego Canals. But you'd be missing a lot. We spent 25 days in this portion of New York State before heading to the 1000 Islands area.

I already covered the first day as we cruised through the city and settled in a nice anchorage in Nyack, NY. We were determined to shake off the stresses of the past month, the WEEK FROM HELL, and the passage up the New Jersey coast.

We still have vestiges of the WEEK FROM HELL. The alternator is still not working so I arranged with my friend Don in Norfolk to send it back to him. He agreed to get the original technician who worked on it there to take another look at it. Also, the aft head still doesn't work right. The Vacuflush system depends on the ability of the vacuum tank to hold a vacuum so it can evacuate the bowl with great vigor when it's flushed. Ours doesn't. It loses vacuum in about 25 minutes and recycles the pump. The head still works, but this is not the way it's supposed to work. So we decided to spend a day anchored off Nyack to take care of these issues. They have a great hardware store and easily accessed post office allowing us to get parts for the next phase of Vacuflush repair and mail off our alternator. Fortunately, I saved the original alternator for the starboard engine. It doesn't work either, but at least I can use it to keep the belt tight and run the water pump.

Nyack was a great "first impression" town for us in New York State. I took the dingy into the Nyack Boat Club, and they were very gracious; allowing me to tie up on their docks. One of their members walked me to the hardware store, showed me the post office and recommended a restaurant for lunch. I felt like I was still "down home". It turns out that the people all over the state are just as genuinely nice and helpful as the guys at the Nyack Boat Club.

Our next stop was to be West Point, about 20 miles up river. Here's where we began to learn about the Hudson River Valley, it's beauty, its history, and its character.

Let's talk about history. We learned that 100 of the 300 battles of the Revolutionary War were fought in New York State. The reason was the strategic importance of the Hudson River. The Hudson River separates the New England States from the rest of the country. If the British could have controlled the Hudson River Valley, they would have succeeded in dividing the Colonies in half. Divide and conquer. The fort at West Point figured heavily in "our" success in holding the Hudson River open. At that site, they stretched a chain across the river, preventing passage by British ships. The British couldn't figure out how to beat the chain and never even tried. Anyway, the Hudson and Mohawk River Valleys have a rich Revolutionary War history. West Point is an impressive facility. It looks like a Dark Ages fortress on the river's edge. We've now seen all three of the service academies. Our favorite is still Annapolis.

It was while we were tied to the West Point terminal that we met our new friends, John and Maedell Stafford. We first met them in Norfolk at the beginning of the WEEK FROM HELL. Then, as we approached West Point, we heard Maedell on the radio and invited them to “raft” with us at the West Point wharf. They did, and we played leap frog with them through the entire NY system. They’re cruising on a sailboat and planned to pass through the Erie Canal and Trent-Severn Canal in Canada so they had to stop before reaching the Erie Canal and unstep their mast. We met them in Catskill, NY and spent three days there helping them with their mast. What a relief to be working on someone else’s boat for a change. That stop made the whole rest of the trip look a little brighter for me.

Our next stop was Troy, NY – the gateway to the Erie Canal. Troy was a big disappointment. We were a little intimidated by the 30 locks we would encounter so we stopped in Troy to check out Lock one. \$58 down the drain. That was the marina fee to stop in Troy. From there, we couldn’t get anywhere near the lock. The Corps of Engineers doesn’t allow the public access to the lock. So we might just as well passed through the lock and stopped on the other side in Waterford where we could stay for free. Live and learn. Why didn’t the guide books tell us not to waste our time?

The 175 mile passage up the Hudson River was a unique experience for us. For the first time, we motored upstream in a wide, deep river with beautiful hilly vistas that changed as the miles passed. There was the city, the Palisades (large rocky cliffs at the waters edge), the Catskills (rolling hills as far as you can see), the mansions (including the Vanderbilt castle), and the capital of New York, Albany. It was also our first experience with major debris in the waterway. We were dodging logs all the way to Oswego because of the spring rains in the area.

For those of you who might be using this account to help plan a similar trip of your own, here are my suggestions on cruising the Hudson. First, the only stop that we would strongly recommend was West Point, but we don’t recommend docking at their wharf. It’s made for large vessels and it’s very difficult to tie up and get off the boat. Also, there is no protection from wakes and we got slammed in the middle of the night by a phantom wake. Instead, I suggest anchoring 6 miles up river at Pollepel Island and coming back by dingy to West Point. Pollepel Island is a great anchorage. Otherwise, set your cruise control and relax. And don’t stop at Troy. Go on through the first lock and stop at Waterford.

Now, let’s talk Erie Canal. The real gateway to the Erie Canal is Waterford, NY. They have a wonderful facility, built recently with a Federal Grant and operated by volunteers from the town. We stayed there for two nights, with power, free of charge. Here we had a chance to relax and check out the first two locks on the Erie Canal, and meet some new friends (notice how important it is for us to meet new friends). Here we met a couple from Michigan City who were just finishing the Great Loop. They gave us a lot of tips about how to survive the rivers down the middle of the country. We would bump in to them several times in the Canal. The town of Waterford is really the highlight of the portion of the Canal we traversed.

The Erie Canal was another big surprise for us. I think we expected a boring canal, not unlike the ICW in northern SC, known as the “ditch”. Not so. Just the short portion we saw has a

myriad of personalities. It starts with a flight of 5 locks that take you up about 160 feet in elevation. Now you have the historic Mohawk River, beautiful and meandering, setting for James Fennimore Cooper's "Last of the Mohicans" and "Drums along the Mohawk". Then, there are the dying towns. I hope they don't die, but their heyday when the Erie Canal was in full swing, ended in the late 50's, and they're having trouble surviving. Let's hope that recreational boating on the Erie Canal can help revive them. Now, Oneida Lake, a large shallow lake is a haven for boaters. Finally, you have the Oswego River, which is one of only two "north flowing" rivers in the US. The other is the St. John's River in Florida. We've cruised it, too.

In Rome, NY we went to the Erie Canal Village, a tourist trap reconstruction of an Erie Canal town. It didn't look like much, but we learned a lot about the Erie Canal history. Guess what! I'm going to share some of it with you.

The Erie Canal was first constructed between 1817 and 1825. It was an immediate financial success, and essentially opened access to the Midwest for trade and made New York City the major port that it was. It was a 40 foot wide by 4 foot deep ditch that joined the Hudson River to Lake Erie and lowered the cost of transporting goods from \$100 per ton to \$7. A second generation canal was built around 1836 and a third generation canal was built in 1917. As railroads entered the scene, it was thought they would put the canal out of business as they did most of the canals in the U.S. In fact, then Governor of New York Martin Van Buren wrote President Andrew Jackson . requesting the President's support in saving the Erie Canal from the railroad monsters. The Governor complained that these monsters barrel through the countryside belching smoke and scaring women, children, and cattle at the breakneck speed of 15 miles per hour.

But the Erie Canal continued to thrive, even with the railroads. The reason was that there was so much commercial traffic through the Hudson River and across New York State, that it kept both the railroads and the barges busy day and night. In fact, the Erie Canal continued to thrive until 1958 and the completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway. The St. Lawrence Seaway opened the Great Lakes to seagoing traffic for the first time, and brought the end to commercial traffic on the Erie Canal. Now, aren't we lucky. As the commercial traffic dies down, room is made for pleasure boats. Thank goodness the Erie Canal was already there. How else would all the Canadians have been able to take their boats to Florida for the winter? You do know that is the main purpose of the canal today, right?

It takes about 5 days to traverse the Erie Canal whether you're a fast boat or a slow one. We took our time and ended up taking nearly 2 weeks. Why? Because we're suppose to be relaxing from time to time and we're going to do it even if it wears us out. So, we spent a couple of days in each of several towns along the Canal to soak up some of the history and character of the area. We even took a day and drove through the Adirondack Mountains. They're beautiful, too.

By the way, the latest update on the WEEK FROM HELL. We finally got the head fixed. It was a simple "O" Ring. The problem is that this device has several "O" rings and the guilty one was naturally the last one to try. Who cares. It's fixed. Yeah!!! The Alternator is still aggravating me. It came back to me as we were getting to the end of the Erie Canal; I put it on; it worked.....for one day. Dammit!! Now, the replacement regulator is misbehaving. Don

agreed to send me a new one under warrantee. We agreed upon Trenton as our next rendezvous with the mailman. This conversation occurred as we left Oswego to begin our trip through the 1000 islands. Stay tuned.

By the way. Somewhere along the way, we decided to change our long and short term objectives. The marina in Washington, DC would not give us a slip commitment so we decided to forget about returning to Washington for the winter. Instead, we'll just do the Great Loop this year and try to make it to Washington some other time. Sooooo... now we're "Loopers".

CANADA – 1000 Islands

Boaters doing the Great Loop have only one fixed objective insofar as the Great Lakes are concerned. They have to go through Chicago to enter the river system that will eventually take them to the Gulf of Mexico. There are many ways to do that. We elected to take the Erie/Oswego canals, then shoot across the eastern end of Lake Ontario to visit the 1000 islands before entering the Trent Severn Canal which would take us to the Georgian Bay and North Channel.

We left Oswego on July 4 bound for the 1000 Islands. The weather was a little "iffy", but the forecast was for conditions to deteriorate for the next few days so we elected to give it a try so we wouldn't have to abandon the 1000 Island portion of our trip. The crossing was only about 30 miles and the wind/wave conditions turned out to be ok – a little uncomfortable, but not too bad.

Once again, we're entering a cruising area we had no experience with, so we tended to believe the worst that we read about it. It's extremely rocky. Therefore, there are millions of rocks looking for our boat so they can leap into it and cause us to sink. There are also sections of flat rock roaming the river floor looking for our anchor so they can make us drag. We must be on a constant alert for these evil-doers.

I'm running out of superlatives. The 1000 Islands were breathtaking. Actually, there are 1800 islands, and every one – no matter how small – has a house on it. We even found one house that covers the entire island so it looks more like a floating house than an island with a house on it. And the house isn't that big.

In the early 19th century, following the War of 1812, when the US and Canada didn't trust each other, there was a treaty that divided the islands in half. Half the land area went to the US and half to Canada. The line meanders through the area such that you're not always certain just which country you're in. In fact there is one property consisting of two small islands, joined by a small bridge – the smallest international bridge in the world.

Our first stop was a picturesque anchorage at Picton Island. It was peaceful and private, but looked across to Clayton, NY. It was so pleasant, we decided to stay another day and "relax". That night we were treated to fireworks from the town of Clayton. I guess they decided to celebrate on Friday night instead of July 4.

The next day we meandered through the 1000 Island area; downstream on the US side, then crossing to the Canadian side and wandering upstream to a nice town called Gananoque. In Gananoque we did the customs thing and stayed a couple of days getting acquainted with Canadians. Here again, entering Canada was very interesting. Of course, we worry-warts were expecting to be boarded by a big surly bureaucrat who would dismantle our boat looking for cigarettes and booze. WRONG! The Marina personnel directed me to a pay phone where I called an 800 number to Canadian customs. The nice woman on the other end asked me a few questions about the boat and contents and gave me a number to remember and that was that. I wonder what it will be like when we try to re-enter the US. Maybe that's where they keep the big surly bureaucrats.

We found the Canadians to be delightful people. But walking around the small towns in the 1000 Island area was strange. Every so often, just like in the US, we would encounter a historic marker commemorating a battle. Guess what! ALL the battles on Canadian soil were fought against the US. WE ATTACKED THEM! And now they're being so nice to us and letting us buy things cheaper than in the US. Generally, things cost about the same in Canada, but in Canadian dollars which are worth about \$0.65US, so it's cheaper. Everything except booze and fuel. It seems that Canada finances their health care system by taxing booze and cigarettes. Logical, but hard on us alcoholics.

We left Gananoque and tried out one of the anchorages on the Canadian side and found it very frustrating. There aren't very many and they're crowded. When we left Gananoque we went to Endymior Island. Not finding room in any of the marked anchorages, we eventually were invited to join a group of sailboaters from NY at a Canadian parks dock. They graciously jiggled their boats around to make room for us to raft for the night and we had a nice visit with them.

Since we found the anchorages so frustrating and the Marinas so reasonable, we decided to go into Kingston for a day to do some shopping and sightseeing. Kingston is a nice little town, complete with its own memorial to the border wars against the US. The highlight of our stay there was the Grizzly Restaurant. They pick you up at the dock in a vintage convertible (in our case a 1967 Thunderbird), and take the long way to the restaurant so you get a nice tour of the town on your way to dinner.

Two days and two nights in Kingston and we were off for Trenton, Ontario for our rendezvous with Kent and Suzie for the trip up the Trent Severn Waterway. They're flying into Toronto on July 14 for 2 weeks. We're looking forward to their company. We left Kingston on Thursday for the 2 day trip to Trenton. It was a pretty ride up the Bay of Quinte to a nice anchorage about 10 miles short of Trenton. Our plan is to go in to Trenton early Friday and rent a car for the weekend and the drive to Toronto.

By the way, the weather has been fantastic. Our only complaint was the day we "meandered" through the 1000 islands the wind was blowing lightly from the north and we ended up with the smoke from a fire in James Bay, Quebec. Look at your map. It must have been a hellova fire.

We arrived in Trenton as planned, got our car, and found out we were sharing the town with a zillion (counted them myself) BMW bikers having their annual gathering. There were bikers there from all over the world, even Canada.

I'm so sorry that this account has not been as entertaining as so many of our previous ones. There were no mishaps; everything worked on board, except the goddamn alternator; etc. Nothing but two old people meandering through the islands, bickering occasionally about whether to anchor and where to go. This was the best I could do. Maybe there will be something in the next leg to entertain you.

In all we spent nine days traveling between Oswego and Trenton. We were anchored 4 nights and spent 4 nights in marinas. It's a very interesting and unique area. It makes my growing list of places I wish I had more time to visit.

TRENT/SEVERN WATERWAY

The Trent-Severn Waterway was near the top of our list as reasons for undertaking this trip. We have heard such wonderful things about it from everyone we met who had traveled this way. This phase of our trip began on Monday, July 15. We had arrived in Trenton, Ontario on Friday morning, rented a car for the weekend to do some shopping, sightseeing, and to drive to Toronto to pick up our crew for the Trent-Severn, Kent and Suzie Berry. If you've been following our adventures, you will remember Kent and Suzie as they are the only friends we have who are either trusting or stupid enough to cruise with us. Of course, if you've been reading about our adventures, you would have to question the intelligence of anyone who might elect to join us. But the Berry's just keep on coming. We're glad. Even if they aren't too bright, they make great company for us. And I guess you probably think we belong together. Sorry Kent. Sorry Suzie. But I can't help it if all these other people think you're stupid to cruise with us.

Anyway, we arrived in Trenton to the sight of a zillion tents set up at the mouth of the Trent River. It seems that our visit was anticipated, and we were welcomed by every biker in the world who owns a BMW motorcycle. They were having their annual rendezvous and the first one outside the US. Except for the traffic at Trenton's traffic light, it was no problem. It was worth the confusion because on Saturday morning there was the parade. There were roughly 1 zillion motorcycles in Trenton. Of these, approximately 6 bikers got out of bed in time to participate in their annual parade down main street. We were so glad we got out there in time. If we'd been 30 seconds late, we would have missed it completely. As Dave Barry likes to say, "I did not make this up."

Sunday, Lynne and I drove our rental car to Toronto to pick up Kent and Suzie and when we returned, we were delighted to see that "Rascal" had arrived. Rascal is a sailboat we had been meeting up with from time to time since we met at West Point. I was hoping we would have their company for the Trent-Severn. Rascal had spent a week in Oswego waiting for weather to cross Lake Ontario. They needed excellent weather because sailboats don't handle well at all when their mast (the big stick that makes sailboats so tall) is horizontal on the boat instead of vertical. Anyway, they were making friends in Oswego while we were cruising the 1000 Islands.

We were especially delighted to have Kent and Suzie join us for this phase of our trip because the Trent-Severn Waterway consists of 42 locks. That's a lot of work for a crew of only two, but more importantly, there are 3 locks on this system that are rather unique, and my Admiral/Mate/Wife announced in advance that she would be portaging her own self across them instead of riding on the boat. Yes, Lynne doesn't like the idea of sitting in a tub of water suspended in mid-air, or riding a railroad up a mountain with the boat in a sling. So, without some outside help, you know what else will be in a sling! More on this later.

The Trent-Severn Waterway is about 240 miles long. Much of it is speed controlled, and it has 42 locks. It takes between 50 and 55 hours to traverse it whether you have a fast boat or slow boat. If you're in a hurry you can travel 10+ hours a day and make it in 5 days (the locks are open from 8:30am till 8pm). We took 12 days, most of them only traveling a few hours. Before we left we had to set up some rules and roles during our numerous locking and docking exercises. The locks in Trent-Severn have steel cables running from top to bottom every 12 feet or so. They expect you to grab one cable near the bow of the boat and one near the stern of the boat to hold it near the wall as the water rises or falls. Sometimes the water is turbulent inside the lock as water enters and usually there are other boats sharing the lock with you. The captains of these boats have varying degrees of competence. To make things proceed smoothly with the least chance of damaging the boat, everyone had a job to do.

*Butch (me) – drive the boat into the lock. Stop when ready, hopefully close enough to the wall for crew to reach a cable. Rest, maybe drink a beer. Later drive the boat out of the lock. Whew!

*Kent – take the bow cable. Hold on for dear life while I bring the stern close enough to the lock to reach the stern cable.

*Suzie – take the stern cable. Hold on for dear life to keep the stern from swinging out and hitting another boat.

*Lynne – turn engines off. Stand around and look princess-like.

*Kent/Suzie – If at anytime it looks like the boat will slam into the wall, or be slammed by another boat, it is the crew's responsibility to place themselves between the boat and the threat. The safety of the boat is our number one concern. You can always find crew (Is this why no one will cruise with us?)

As I've said already several times, we left Monday morning, around noon and traveled 14 miles and 6 locks in about 4 ½ hours. You must figure you'll only average 8 mph(statute) while moving and take an average of 30 minutes per lock. We tied up to the bottom of lock 7 for the night, joined by our friends on "Rascal". Remember the WEEK FROM HELL? We still have the alternator problem. My friend, Don had sent us a third regulator to Trenton, but I agreed not to connect it until we could verify that the alternator was actually working properly and incapable of destroying a regulator. So Tuesday morning I climbed down to my favorite hangout in the bilge and proceeded to test the alternator ONE MORE TIME with Kent as my trusty sidekick to handle the engines. You may have noticed that Kent has a somewhat negative influence on my IQ (Its not really his fault; it just happens). So, I'm testing away and it's not working, so at one point, I decided to put my hand on the casing to see if it was hot. I wasn't paying close enough attention and WHACK – my left thumb was caught by the rotors on the alternator (they're like fan blades only closer together). DARN – my first words. I looked down, and to my surprise, I still had a thumb. It had a huge purple spot, but it was all there. But

it smarted just a little. Too bad I didn't smart a few minutes earlier, instead of dumbing like I did. Enough said. That was enough work for the day. We wrapped up my thumb so it would stay attached for a while and left to continue our voyage hoping my stupidity wouldn't rub off on anyone else.

Day two, we traveled 14 miles and 9 locks in 7 hours. I think this was our longest day on the system. We stopped just below the first of the Trent-Severn's "flight" locks. Let me tell you something about locks. A lock is a chamber designed to help boats make step changes in elevation to travel between two bodies of water at different elevations. Usually, accompanied by a dam they raise the boat from the lower elevation body of water to the higher elevation body of water (or vice versa). It has doors at each end and big concrete walls for sides. Here's how it works. A boat enters from the lower body of water and the door is closed. Valves open that allow water to flow from the higher body of water into the lock. Depending upon the design of the lock and the mercy of the lock operator, this operation can cause a great deal of turbulence inside the lock, buffeting the boats around. (The Trent Severn operators were more merciful than the Erie Canal operators as they let the water in slower and there was minimal turbulence. This is easier on the crew – and we value our crew.) When the water level in the lock reaches the level of the higher body of water, the other door opens and the boat leaves. Boats enter from the higher body of water; doors close again; and valves allow water to exit the lock into the lower body of water. Lower doors open; boats leave, and the cycle is completed. The cool thing about the Trent-Severn locks is that they're manually operated. That means the operator actually turns a crank (by walking around in a circle 63 times) to open the doors and valves. When they aren't turning their crank, they're very friendly and love to chat with boaters.

Sometimes the elevation change is so great that the engineers decided to use two locks in series to make the elevation change. In this case there are two chambers separated by a huge door that is as tall as the total elevation change. The first lock brings the level up half way and the second lock brings the level up the rest of the way. Locks 16 and 17 were just such locks. They had a total rise of 30 feet. That means the center door was 30 feet tall.

We took the flight locks on the third day, Wednesday. That day we traveled 15 miles and 3 locks in 4 hours, stopping in Hastings, Ontario. It was here that we met up with one of "Rascal's" friends from Oswego. Chuck and Jane Miller are looping aboard a smaller Gulfstar trawler named "Cea Jay". Now, we're three boats occasionally traveling together. Before I continue, I have to share a joke told by Jayne.

"This blond calls 911 and frantically tells the operator that her house is on fire and please come quickly to put the fire out. The operator responds, "Of course, we'll send the fire department out immediately. Tell me how they get there." The blond replies, "DUH! BIG RED TRUCK!" (Any blonds out there who understood this joke – please don't be offended). So – for our merry band of travelers, DUH! BIG RED TRUCK!" has become a chorus whenever appropriate.

It was in Hastings that I committed another dumb-di-tude. Wednesday night we were sitting around the picnic table with other boaters and I got to talking about my alternator (the thumb still hurts, but it's getting better, thank you) when a young Canadian with the group offers to help me. Great I say, what can you do for me? And we leave the group to look at the alternator. His name

was Tim. Tim says he works closely with a local auto shop and they can test the alternator if I want to take it to their shop the next morning. OK, I say and he actually walked me to the shop and pointed it out, and told me who to ask for. Ask for Kenny he said. We continued talking and he told me he did auto upholstery for them. I asked him if he knew how to make bug screens for boats and he say, of course, so we started talking about what it would take to make bug screens for Aisling. Lynne and I were beginning to worry about the mosquitoes in Canada and Michigan. One thing led to another, and before you know it, I've given him \$200 (Canadian) to buy material and he promised to be back to the boat in late afternoon the following day to install the new screens. He even gave us his name, address and phone number along with a map to his house in Hastings.

The next morning, Thursday, I think; Kent descended to my playroom (remember, I'm now not trusted around machinery of any kind) and removed the alternator. We walked up to the auto shop and asked for Kenny to test our alternator. Everyone there looked at us like we were stupid – imagine that. There's no Kenny here and we cannot test your alternator. We take them 30 miles up the road to be tested. "Tim told me to come here and ask for Kenny", I said. "Whose Tim?" Uh-oh. This is a very bad sign. We decided to walk to Tim's house, using his map. We walked and walked. He lived on Center Street. There is no Center Street. This is another very bad sign. We waited all day and all night for him to come to the boat and install the screens. DUH! BIG RED TRUCK! He never showed up. So we licked our wounds and continued our journey having lost \$200 and a whole day.

Friday, the fifth day, we traveled 39 miles and 1 lock in 5 ½ hours to Peterborough, Ontario. It's a neat town with lots of shopping and amenities and we stayed there through Saturday night to attend one of their free concerts. Every Wednesday and Saturday night in the summer they have a free concert in the park by the waterfront, followed by a lighted boat parade and fireworks. It was a blast. The concert was performed by Michelle Wright, a Canadian country singer and she was quite good. Also, while we were in Peterborough, Kent and I took our alternator to a local alternator shop for testing. It was definitely not working. I was getting tired of fighting this alternator so I bought a smaller (60amp) model compatible with my regulator from him for \$100 Canadian (about \$65 US). We put it on and after only two more trips to the auto parts stores to get the right sized belt we were ready to test the new alternator and new regulator. HURRAY!!! THEY BOTH WORKED!!! THE WEEK FROM HELL IS NOW OFFICIALLY OVER! That was on July 20. The WEEK FROM HELL started on May 10. It lasted 10 weeks. Now that's the last time I'm going to talk about THE WEEK FROM HELL.

I know this is getting long, but the Trent-Severn is really interesting. It you're getting bored, tough it out.

Now, Sunday, the morning we've all been waiting for. This is the day we go through the much talked about Peterborough Lift Lock. This is one of the unconventional locks I alluded to earlier. One Lynne will portage. A lift lock doesn't work at all like a conventional lock. They are designed for large elevation changes, and in some cases, considered easier to engineer and construct than "flight locks." Here's how they work. Imagine two huge tubs of water. One is at the level of the lower body of water while the other is at the level of the higher body of water. You can see that the "high" one is supported by a huge metal cylinder. It turns out that they both

are. in this case the two bodies of water are separated by 65 feet, so the cylinders are at least 65 feet long. The two cylinders are controlled by hydraulics and are interconnected. Both tubs of water have doors at each end, just like in a lock. Boats on both bodies of water enter their tub. The doors close. The lockmaster adds 1 foot of water to the “upper” tub. Now it’s heavier than the lower tub. It starts down while the lower one is forced up. When they stabilize at the new level, the doors open, and the boats leave. It’s quick and simple. When it was built in 1905, the Peterborough Lift Lock was considered an engineering marvel. It still is, and at 65 feet, it’s still the tallest lift lock in the world. And for you structural engineers out there, it’s built entirely of UNreinforced concrete. It was a blast, and we had Lynne to take pictures of Aisling going through. Since she’s my one and only and she had my camera, we stopped at the top of the lock and picked her up before continuing on our way.

The Lift lock was the Sunday highlight. That day we traveled 22 miles and 8 locks (including the lift lock) in 6 ½ hours. Sunday night we were able to anchor in one of the many lakes in the western part of the system. I haven’t told you anything about dockage on the Trent-Severn. The lock system is operated by Parks Canada. At each lock there is an extended wall on both right and left sides and at both the top and bottom of the lock. Boats are permitted to tie to the wall overnight and use washroom facilities at the lock for a fee of \$.50 per foot (Canadian). That amounts to \$15US per night for Aisling. There’s no power or water, but they’re very secure and usually either in town, in a park or both. It’s very pleasant and you can swim off the boat there. Just watch out for Tim. Anyway, Sunday night we were able to anchor out in Stony Lake and it was really pretty, and free! We were joined by Rascal and Cea Jay.

It’s now been a week, and our crew continues to stay with us. We haven’t scared them off and they haven’t had to sacrifice themselves to save the boat. Monday we covered 29 miles and 3 locks in 5 ½ hours, ending up in a nice little town called Bobcaygeon. Here, we almost lost one of the boats in our growing flotilla. The town of Bobcaygeon is located at lock 30 so all the boats stopped at the lock are right in the middle of town. There’s lots of room, but it’s also very popular. Rascal was the last boat out of the lock and didn’t like the last remaining dock space so they decided to move on. A thunderstorm came up and distracted them and they wandered out of the channel. In the Intercoastal Waterway, if you wander out of the channel, you embarrassingly hit aground and sometimes get caught in the mud. In Canada, you hit a rock. Rascal hit a rock. Anxious and – a little – panicky they checked their bilge and found it full of water. Uh-oh. Now what? The nearest haulout facility is 20 miles back the other way. So, they turned around and came back to Bobcaygeon, put into the marina, and prepared for what might be a major problem. Thank goodness it turned out ok. The bilge was full of water because the bilge pump switch had malfunctioned and the bilge had accumulated water over the past few days of rain and inattention. There is no leak. A scuba dive to examine the bottom showed no damage; just a smudge in the paint on the keel. Rascal would remain with us.

Tuesday, day 9, we trudged on, covering 24 miles and 2 locks in 3 ½ hours to Balsam Lake. Here we found very poor holding. The bottom was very rocky. Since winds were light and projected to stay light, we just put out a bunch of chain so the weight of the chain would hold us in place in case the anchor wasn’t as secure as we thought. We had done a little sightseeing in Bobcaygeon that morning and took a cooling-off swim in the afternoon. Just another shitty day in paradise.

Wednesday, we began the trip down. The first 35 locks of the Trent-Severn Waterway take boats up in elevation from Lake Ontario. The last 7 locks take you back down to the level of Lake Huron. The first down lock is the Kirkfield Lift Lock. Working on the same principle as the Peterborough Lift Lock, the only thing unique about this experience is that we were going down instead of up. Think about what that means. Entering the Peterborough lock for west-bound boats is a lot like entering a regular lock as you are entering the lower tub of water. You have a door that's open in front of you, side walls, and a very high back wall. No problem; just drive in and stop. Westbound boats entering the Kirkfield lock are entering the top tub of water. As you enter and get closer to the far gate, which is just barely above the top level of the water, you begin to see over the edge and it's 60 feet down. What happens if your boat won't go into reverse and stop moving forward? What if you hit the gate? What if the gate comes open? It was exhilarating! We're in the home stretch now. All locks are down locks and less work for the crew.

This day we covered 33 miles and 6 locks in 7 hours. We anchored in the shadow of Strawberry Island in Lake Simcoe. This is important because this was the week of the Pope. He arrived at Strawberry Island for R & R the same day. Police boats were everywhere so we were unable to get close enough for an audience, but some of our crew swears that they saw a white-clad figure in the top of the trees giving the fleet a blessing as we passed by.

We're almost there. Just two days to go, but still with highlights. Thursday, we covered 39 miles and 2 locks in 7 hours and ended up tied to the dock at Big Chute. Big Chute is another major highlight on the Trent-Severn Waterway. Shortly after World War I, with most of the Trent-Severn Waterway completed and strong pressure to complete it, only one obstacle remained. It was a connection at Big Chute, Ontario, the site of a major rapid. Unfortunately, money was too short to pay to cut through the 600 feet of rock to build a canal and lock, so they came up with the creative idea of building a railway to transport boats up over the rocky hill and back down to the river below. The first railway was small and could only accommodate a few small boats. It was later enlarged and later still replaced with the current one. You must see it to believe it. The platform looks like a huge travel lift with a bottom. As you approach in your boat, the bottom of the platform is underwater. You drive up under the direction of the railway operators. They use a series of slings to support the boat as the keel rests on the platform bottom. Then it is pulled by cables up a slight incline to the top of the hill, and "allowed" to roll back down the western incline to the water's edge on the other side. The platform is kept level by an ingenious combination of using two sets of tracks – one for front wheels, the other for back wheels. The tracks are set at different elevations, based upon the slope of the incline, so at any given time the platform is approximately level. When you get to the bottom, the boat floats off the straps and you drive away. The entire process takes about 20 minutes; less than the time to pass through a conventional lock. Too dry? Ok, you had to be there.

Friday was our last day on the Trent-Severn. We passed through the Big Chute railway and one more lock in Port Severn, making our way to Midland to deposit our crew. They had arranged transportation to Toronto from there. Lynne and I rented a slip at the marina for a whole week so we could chill out a little and wait for Rascal to arrive for their mast stepping.

Next stop – Georgian Bay.

GEORGIAN BAY/NORTH CHANNEL

The Georgian Bay is a large body of water in northern Lake Huron. Cruising the Georgian Bay involves winding through the thousands of islands along the northern shore of the bay. There is a well-marked channel that leads you through. It looks completely impassible if you look at it on a small-scale chart showing the entire north shore, but when you zoom in to a detailed large scale chart, you see that it's quite easy to follow. There are so many places to anchor in this area, you're left with having to decide which ones to pass up. This is painful. Especially for a Libra. Pity me == please! Another interesting fact about this area is that many of the anchorages are popular, but small, so the custom in many is to drop a hook and tie to shore so the boat won't swing on anchor; or just tie to a rock.

The small boat channel ends in Killarny, Ontario after 240 miles of meandering through all these islands ranging in size from large rock to pretty big island. Like the 1000 islands area we cruised in early July, many of these rocks have cottages on them. Many of the large rocks are just beneath the surface, but there're well marked and visible, so if you screw up and leave the channel you can still avoid hitting a rock --- if you're looking. We're trying to take our time and enjoy this awesome cruising area as much as we can, so we plan to cover 30-40 miles a day, go for a swim or hike every day and practice relaxing. This is my main goal for the Georgian Bay and North Channel cruise.

We've been joined by another boat. We first met Tom and Jean of Amadon Light in Rome, NY, and we've seen them from time to time along the way. When we left Midland to head out to the Georgian Bay, we met with all our new friends at the first anchorage in Longuissa Bay in the 30,000 Island area. Now we're traveling with three other boats; Rascal, a 40 foot Hinkley sailboat with John and Maedell Stafford on board; CeaJay, a 36 foot Gulfstar trawler with Chuck and Jayne Miller on board; and Amadon Light, a 32 foot Grand Banks trawler. We don't go to every anchorage together, but we stay in touch and usually share an anchorage with one of them. With all these new friends, we have a new problem. "What will we do about happy hour?" Four couples is just a little too much of a crowd for anyone's boat. What to do? What to do? We decided that if our big boats were too small for happy hour, we would resort to our dingies. That's right. We did a dingy drift. In a dingy drift, everyone meets out in the middle of the anchorage in their dingy, with their drink of choice and a snack to contribute. The appointed meeting time is always 5:01pm. We tie the dingies together and have happy hour together. The first person who finishes his/her drink or has to pee, breaks the raft and we all go home to dinner. It's fun, but passing snacks around continuously really interferes with drinking. This will become a frequent source of complaint as we refine our dingy drifting technique.

Our first stop was a highly recommended anchorage only 2 hours from Midland called Longuissa Bay. It's beautiful, large enough for many boats, had hiking and climbing areas and was private. In Canada, they give an unusual importance to having the boaters avoid invading the privacy of the "cottagers". Personally, I don't get it, but the "cottagers" are very possessive about the water in front of their property, and apparently, the boaters cater to this attitude. So, we tried our best to comply whenever we could. Still, we had a couple of minor clashes along the way. Longuissa

Bay was recommended because of the absence of cottagers. We did our first dingy drift here. Three dingies tied side by side. It was fun but awkward. We must work on our technique.

Next stop was Echo Bay, also highly recommended. The trip was short, only about 30 miles. We did the tying to shore thing here. While the trip was short, it wasn't without the excitement caused by extreme dumb-de-tude. Because we were planning short, protected legs with anchorages as our destinations, we decided to tow our dingy. Sounds like a good idea. People do it all the time, right? Well, they're apparently much more intelligent than we are. As we raised our anchor, we had the dingy tied along-side with a bow and stern line. Somehow they got askew and the dingy got turned around so the stern was facing forward. As soon as we moved the big boat forward, the dingy swamped. (Expletive deleted). I fixed the lines so the dingy was trailing the big boat, then jumped into the dingy – mostly filled with water – and told Lynne to drive on. Bailing, Bailing, Bailing. Pulled the plug. As long as we're going forward, the movement causes suction, drawing the water out of the dingy. Boy, did we look like a couple of morons (pronounced MOE – RON). We got the water out, set up a proper tow, and Lynne let me back on the boat so we could proceed. Then we got a call from CeaJay telling us it was windy and rough outside, so we decided to put the dingy back on the roof. During our maneuvering, we got the dingy tow line tangled in the propeller. So, there we were, in a very narrow channel, surrounded by rocks, and one engine down because the propeller has line wrapped around it. We managed to look stupid AGAIN! But we survived. The dingy got back on the roof and we got the line loose from the propeller so we were able to proceed into the cold cruel world.

We were the last to arrive at Echo Bay from our group and found everyone had dropped an anchor in the middle of the basin and tied their stern to shore. It was windy and naturally the wind was blowing in the wrong direction for maneuvering the stern towards shore, but we managed. Being the last to arrive worked to our advantage. Ceajay was there waiting with his dingy and took our stern lines to tie to shore. The first line he tied to a rock the size of the one used to seal Jesus' tomb. The first gust of wind moved the whole rock about three feet. We decided a second line just might make us feel a little more secure. As soon as we were finally secured, the wind died, and all was well with the world.

We stayed at Echo Bay for one day and proceeded on another 38 miles to our next anchorage at Shawanaga Island. Here we had our first encounter with a cottager. We found a very nice anchorage at the end of the channel and after a couple of hours, one of the cottagers who lived in that basin came up to "recommend" that we move. He gave us a line about a party that night and dozens of boats that would be coming through before and AFTER the party. We moved. We found a very nice little cove nearby where we could see all these boats, but they wouldn't have to steer around us. They never came. I think we were conned. I think I don't like these "cottagers". We had a nice stay here. The weather forced us to stay an extra day and we spent that time helping "Rascal" get wired between his PC and his GPS so he could navigate by PC. It was a fun, all-male project. Male bonding and all that. We got Rascal's GPS and PC talking to each other, so they can now watch the little boat move along the chart, all-the-while telling you exactly where the boat is relative to the rocks, etc. there's nothing like a rainy day to give you an excuse to do a lot of nothing. We did refine our dingy drift. We now tie the bows together and drift in a "star" pattern. Now we can pass hor's dervs around in a circle – clockwise and drink

and talk. It's fun, but there's much too much handling of hor's dervs and not enough tilting of the glass. Still, lots of fun.

Next stop – the Bustards. At this point, we're ready to move to the next phase. We're looking forward to spending a couple of days in the marina in Killarny. In fact, the story going around amongst our new cruising friends, is that Aisling is moving ahead so Lynne can get her "marina time". So be it. Lynne and I both enjoy anchoring in pretty, interesting anchorages, but we also both enjoy some time tied to a piece of wood connected to shore. We traveled 48 miles to the Bustards and then another 42 miles the next day to Killarny.

Killarny is a teensy-weensy little town that serves as the junction between the Georgian Bay and the North Channel. We thought it would be a major provisioning stop – WRONG. No real grocery store; just a little shop with very little to choose from. Great nightclub. We went there two nights in a row. Also, great fish and chips. Fish and chips are very popular in this part of Canada so every little town brags about their little fish and chips dive. The highlight of the stay was the trip to the dump. A couple of locals took us to the dump to see the bears. We counted no less than 10 bears feeding and playing on the garbage at the dump. We have pictures – all taken from INSIDE the car.

If you're tracking the numbers, we traveled 188 miles in 5 days with 1 lay day. We would have loved to take longer, but the drive to keep moving pushes us all onward.

We left Killarny on Thursday, August 8, and began our cruise through the North Channel. The North Channel of Lake Huron is a body of water about 160 miles long and is defined to the north by the mainland of Ontario and the south by Manitoulin Island. Manitoulin Island has the distinction of being the largest island in a fresh water lake in the world. And, if you're keeping track there is a lake on the island – Lake Manitoulin that is the largest lake on an island in a fresh water lake in the world. By the way, if I had gone on the lake, I could have been the biggest dummy on a lake that is the largest freshwater lake on an island on a freshwater lake in the world. But I didn't. Instead, we went to a wonderful anchorage, called Covered Portage Cove, just 5 miles out of Killarny for a rendezvous with all our friends we picked up along the way. We had a great reunion. Our dingy drift got bigger – almost too big. But still fun. We also went blueberry picking. The entire Georgian Bay/North Channel area is covered with wild blueberries. Most of our friends had been picking them from the start. They've been eating blueberry muffins, blueberry pancakes, blueberry on their cereal, blueberry in just about everything. We had some blueberry muffins and decided that was enough for us.

Overall, we spent 12 days putsing around in the North Channel area. We picked blueberries, anchored in a bay that's the closest thing to a fjord in this hemisphere, visited the charming little Ontario town of Little Current, and got weathered in for four days with good friends. It was just about all the relaxation I can stand. Our last stop was Beardrop Harbor. It's a pretty place, but we couldn't go ashore because all the surrounding land is owned by the Indians. We were there four days because the wind picked up and the prediction was for a major storm to pass through the area.

In the end, after four days of hanging out in 30-40 mph winds waiting for that big storm, everyone was ready to take on the next big challenge, Lake Michigan. So, we went to Drummond Island for the complex process of returning to our homeland (all it took was a radio call), and headed for the BIG BAD LAKE.

THE LAKES

After weeks of traveling in protected waters, we all approach the great lakes with some trepidation. We're used to moderate winds and no waves at all. Now, we listen to the weather almost continuously trying to figure out whether to go or stay. From Drummond Island, where we were repatriated, we had to cross the NW arm of Lake Huron to Machinac Island. We've seen the boonies. Now it's time for good old American Tourists. Machinac Island has a state-run marina with a really strange reservation policy, but we managed to get a reservation for August 20 and 21. And despite all our worries, on August 20, we managed to traverse the 47 miles across the Lake to the Island. Now, we're home – sort of. Machinac Island is famous for its refusal to allow mechanized transportation. Except for the Fire Trucks and Ambulance, all transportation on the Island is either bicycles or horses. Sound romantic? Try smelling horse manure all day long. I think it would be quaint if I, as the privileged, special person that I am (or should be), could visit an undisturbed village like Machinac Island. Now, I'm just sharing a tourist trap with a bunch of other tourists. I don't feel very special here. Still, we enjoyed our stay. We bought fudge and rode our bikes around the island. It was nice not having to worry about cars running us down.

After two days Lynne and I have tired of the tourist trap and are ready to move on. So, on August 22, we took off to Lake Michigan. Of course, we were concerned about the weather, as we have been getting conflicting weather forecasts, but our passage was uneventful and we made 64 miles to Charlevois, Michigan.

All our buddies were there. CeaJay was just anchoring in the main harbor as we arrived. We didn't like it there. The water was 30-40 feet deep and the harbor too small for many boats to swing in water that deep. Sooo, we went on to Lake Charlevois and anchored in Oyster Bay in Lake Charlevois. It's only a couple of miles by dingy into Charlevois, so we dinked in to meet with CeaJay, go ashore for some important grocery shopping and stayed to grill some steaks with them. Welllll, by the time we were done it was dark and we had to cross Lake Charlevois in the dark of night with no compass or familiar landmarks. Our friends from CeaJay, lacking complete confidence in our navigation skills, asked us to call them on the radio when we arrived back to Aisling. We agreed. After wandering around Lake Charlevois, lost for 15 or 20 minutes, we called CeaJay on our handheld radio to tell them not to worry that we might be lost just because they haven't heard from us yet. The reason they hadn't heard from us yet was simply because we weren't absolutely certain where Aisling was, but were confident that we would eventually find her. Sure 'nuf, we found the entrance to Oyster Bay and saw our good friends Tom and Jean from Amadon Light waving their spotlight back and forth, back and forth. Apparently, they heard us call CeaJay that we were a little misplaced and decided to signal us to help us find our way. How humiliating. At least now we knew where we were and turned up the juice to get there as soon as possible. Not exactly. It seems the outboard was out of gas. Now, you might be wondering how, in the middle of the night, we are going to coax our dingy to make

the ½ mile remaining to Aisling which is now being lit up by the Amadon Light spotlight so we can find it. We may be dumb, but we're not stupid. We had a spare gas tank. All I had to do was transfer the gas in total darkness to the main tank and get the motor restarted. This I did, and we quickly made our way to Amadon Light to inform them that we were, indeed, not lost and never were. We just had a little trouble finding our way. That's all.

At this point, our group is splitting up. CeaJay and Amadon Light were headed down the coast, while Rascal planned to go into the Grand Traverse Bay for a few days. We decided to join them and were rewarded with 4 days of beautiful cruising. The water in Grand Traverse Bay is crystal clear. At our anchorage in Bowers Harbor the second night, we could actually see the anchor sitting on the bottom. That's NOT something I ever expected in the Great Lakes. We had four marvelous days with stops in Elk Rapids, Bowers Harbor, Traverse City and Northport. We got our first taste of Lake Michigan nasty in the wee hours of the morning after a quiet night anchored off Northport. The wind picked up and suddenly Aisling was being tossed about in 2-3 foot waves. Too rough for sleeping so we weighed anchor and took off. Rascal cruised closer to shore to find some calmer water and wait out the wind. We took off and headed out to the lake. The wind was from the east so all we needed to do was get to the lee side of the shore and we should find calm waters. Unfortunately, that took a 2 hour roller coaster trip. Worked out ok. We were a little uncomfortable for those 2 hours, then had a nice cruise to Frankfort, MI (69 miles in 7 hours. Thanks to our early morning start, we got to Frankfort in time for an afternoon stroll in town.

We found Frankfort lacking the charm of Elk Rapids and convenience of Northport and moved on the next day (Wednesday, August 28) to continue our trek south. The next few days we anchored in Portage Lake and Pentwater Lake on our way to our next rendezvous with our buddies in Muskegon. We all anchored in front of the Municipal Marina and found the Marina and the town to be the most boater friendly town we had encountered so far. We stayed there 5 days, partly because of weather, used every form of transportation in town, including a free ride from the Municipal marina, almost free trolley all over town, etc. All in all, I highly recommend this stop to everyone.

While we stayed there 5 days, we tried to leave on the third day. The weather forecast sounded reasonable, so we raised our anchor and headed for the canal to Lake Michigan. As we approached the canal, the clouds looked ominous so I decided to listen to Lynne's protests just this once and we veered away from the canal and anchored. The hook went down none too soon, for just as we got settled, the storm hit and we had sustained winds of around 30 knots with gusts up to 60. Not fun.

We finally did leave on Wednesday, September 4 and joined all our friends again in Saugatuck, and the next day to Michigan City. One of our buddies had arranged a dockage deal with a local restaurant for \$15 per night. The slips were kind of small though. All we had to do was run the bow up onto shore and tie across the entrance of another slip housing one of our cruising friends. Check out the picture. While we were in Michigan City, we had a reunion with Tom and Peg from "Lively Romp" who we first met on the Hudson River. Tom and Peg live near Michigan City and had just closed the Loop on their sailboat. For some reason Tom and Peg took a likin' to us and treated us like a king and queen; loaned us a car for shopping, took us

on a tour of the Great Sand Dunes; had us over for dinner. They have a beautiful home right on the lake surrounded by Sand Dune Parks. What an ax to bear. Their home is so beautiful, they have trouble leaving it to go cruising. I pity them. I really do.

We're off again and headed for the big city. If you've been paying attention, you remember we couldn't deal with New York and passed through without even stopping. This time we're determined to enjoy the city, even if it kills us. So, we went in to the Burnham Harbor Marina, paid them a small fortune for three days dockage, and attacked the big city. Spending three days in a city like Chicago is like going to a gourmet restaurant and just ordering an hors d' oeuvres.

THE RIVERS

Tuesday, September 10, we start a new phase in our travels. More apprehension. We'll be passing under some very low bridges; we'll be competing for space with huge tug/barge combinations; and there are limited facilities and anchorages in the Illinois/Mississippi/Ohio portion of this phase. So, for professional worriers, there's a lot of material here.

There are two routes from Lake Michigan to the Illinois River. The most popular route is the Chicago River that runs right through downtown Chicago. The problem with this route is that there is a fixed bridge in this route with a 17 foot clearance. Our bridge roof is 16 feet above the water, so to clear the bridge we must remove everything attached to the roof, including the radar. The second route is the Cal-Sag canal which runs through a heavily industrialized area in Indiana. This route has a 19 foot fixed bridge. We still have to remove some stuff, but not the radar.

While we were in Chicago, I managed to get the radar partially dismantled to the point that our height was reduced to 16 foot 8 inches. Hell, we can clear the bridge by 4 inches. Piece of cake. Now we can take the preferred route through downtown Chicago. Tuesday morning as we're getting ready to leave, we got a phone message from one of our cruising friends that the lock entering the Chicago River would be shut down all morning and most of the remainder of the day. Is this an omen? A sign of things to come? At least we had an alternative. We took off and headed for the Cal-Sag canal. It was an interesting ride. This canal runs through a very industrialized portion of Hammond, Indiana. Power plants, steel mills, processing plants, etc. etc. Also, barges everywhere leaving a canal just wide enough for a barge to go through, but not wide enough for a barge and a pleasure boat. At one point, early in the process we were headed for a barge with a pushing tug that was across the canal, blocking it completely. The tug appeared to be pushing off to the right, but it wasn't obvious to me where it would fit. Behind me another barge was being pushed towards us. I thought about tying to a parked barge on my right, but then I noticed that it was moving, too. Now, I'm in this canal about 2 feet wide (looks to me like), with three moving tug/barges all around me. What to do? What to do? We weren't crushed. The first tug huffed and puffed and made a hole just wide enough for me to squeeze by, and that's just what I did. This was the big excitement of this long day. We traveled 57 miles and 2 locks in 9 hours.

We ended up in Joliet. They offer a free wall to cruisers with limited power and the city employees who maintain the nearby park are extremely helpful. You know what you do when you encounter a situation like this one. You stay a while. We stayed three days.

Tuesday - Another long day on the river. We traveled a mere 46 miles. We also passed through 3 locks. Here we found out that the lock gods are not with us on this leg of our trip. We were traveling with Rascal, the dismasted sailboat. The first lock was harmless enough. We got in almost immediately and out quickly; altogether a one-hour exercise. It was at the second lock that we learned the facts of life. As we arrived at the lock, we learned that there was a “problem” with a “double” tow at the other end of the lock. Now, I must explain some of the protocols of the locks on the US rivers. First, the order of priority for locking through goes, (1) Government vessels, (2) Commercial vessels, (3 & last) Pleasure boats. That means, we’re last. The other thing most people don’t know is that many of the tug/barges are larger than the locks. The locks on the Illinois River are 600 feet long. Many of the tug/barges are twice that, so they must break in half and the lock has to cycle twice to get them through. This process takes 1 ½ - 3 hours. During that time, no one else moves. It turns out that as they broke an upbound tow, one of the center barges sank – RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE LOCK DOORS. It didn’t actually sink, but it did fill with water and drop enough in the water to prevent that group from entering the lock. We were to wait in undetermined length of time until the problem was resolved. That turned out to be about 4 hours. After a 4 hour wait, the lockmaster called us and announced that the 3 pleasure boats could lock through, if they could fit in the narrow entrance. We had to wind our way through because the front half of the barge/tug had locked through and was blocking direct access to the lock entrance at the top where we were. Meanwhile the back half was blocking access from the bottom entrance. A fine state of affairs. We got into the lock ok, but getting out was not so easy. Aisling was third in line. The first boat was a Sportfisherman. He hit the rocks. There was very little room between the barge and the rocks, and you cannot go directly by the lock. You have to make a sweet port turn around the front corner of the barge, while avoiding the rocks. After seeing what happened to the first boat, I decided to err on the side of coming close to the barge. I hit the barge, creating a small scrape on the hull. I HATE it when that happens. At the third lock, we had another “double” and had to wait another 2 ½ hours. Altogether, we waited 7 hours for locks and it was pitch dark when we left the last lock with 2 miles to the marina. All I can say is thank the lord for electronic navigation and radar. Staying in the channel was easy enough, but finding a 50-foot-wide cut in the bank in the dark is not so easy. As we approached the area the marina is SUPPOSED to be, Lynne could see nothing with the spotlight. The computer showed us even with the cut; the radar showed a cut directly to the right, so I turned and crossed my fingers we wouldn’t be driving into the bank. We didn’t. The cut was right where we hoped it would be. Some guys on shore directed us to the gas dock and we calmly tied up for the night – just like we knew what we were doing. YES!!

We learned an important lesson this day. Expect to get screwed at the locks as long as we’re on these commercial rivers.

Saturday, we set off again, headed for Henry’s, a small marina 46 miles away noted for the fact that larger transient boats must tie up inside an old lock. This lock was built in the 19th Century and decommissioned in the 1920’s and it looked it. It was the roughest place we had to tie up in the entire journey. The granite wall was badly deteriorated and all we had to tie to were steel

stakes driven into the ground 20 feet away and the roots of nearby trees. Still, it was quaint, and we met some new friends there, Dave and Cindy on “Fiesta”, a 48 foot Krogen. What a beautiful boat. We were to travel with them for a couple of weeks.

We spent a day at Henry’s watching football and took off again on Monday, headed for Peoria. All our guides suggest that cruisers all stop at one of the 3-4 marinas. As we arrived in Peoria with Rascal and Fiesta close behind us, we couldn’t find one that had enough water depth to allow us access. Fortunately, a local boater came on the radio and suggested we anchor across from town near the Coast Guard Station. Cruisers, take note. None of the guides tell you about this fantastic anchorage. The three of us anchored there and continued the next day to Beardstown, IL, 74 miles downriver to tie up to a corn barge.

Wednesday - Another day of waiting on locks. Today, we left the corn barge at 0-dark-hundred and headed to our only lock about an hour away. About halfway there, we heard another boat calling the lock to find out that there was yet another “double” going through so they had a 2 hour wait. By the time we got there it was to be a wait of 1 ½ hours. Of the three boats in our caravan, Aisling was the first to arrive, so we anchored and let Fiesta and Rascal tie alongside for the wait. Time to relax and wait. The rest of the day was uneventful. We encountered numerous barges this day, but we’re old hands at it now. Today we traveled 67 miles and 1 lock in just under 9 hours. The good news for the day was that we knew we had a place to stay for the night. There’s a restaurant in Hardin that has good docks in deep water and lots of space. They also have great food. As we arrived, we heard from Amadon Light. They were anchored nearby in an anchorage we knew nothing about. We would have loved to join them but have a commitment to be at the Restaurant dock to take on fuel from a fuel truck arriving on Thursday.

Thursday - Today we were introduced to the Great Mississippi River. Fortunately, this is to be a short day, only 35 miles. We started the day meeting a local fuel truck to take on 400 gallons of diesel fuel. We haven’t fueled since we were at the top of Lake Michigan and are in dire need. The sky looks foreboding, but the rains held until we had fueled and gotten underway. We’ve traveled this day with Fiesta and with the threats of thunderstorms, we decided to pull back on the throttles and follow them. That way if we encounter a barge in a thunderstorm, we can hear Fiesta’s cries of horror before we get run down by an unseen monster. The storms never came. The river got wide enough to share easily with the large barges, and it was an easy 4 hours to Alton Marina just north of St. Louis. Time for a reunion. All the boats we’ve met along the way are there, except CeaJay. Here we will stay for a couple of days and try to clean the boat. After tying to old lock walls and corn barges, it is shamefully dirty. I’m beginning to think we’re too anal for this lifestyle. The dirt is driving me nuts.

We got the boat cleaned and stocked up on groceries and we’re ready to go. So, Saturday morning we got up at 0-dark-thirty and cast off. Hark, as I leave the dock and put the starboard engine in reverse, I hear the not-so-sweet sounds of grating and grinding. Somehow, I made it back to the dock with only a port engine to find out where these sounds are coming from. Down to the bilge I go to look for anything unusual. I looked at the engine on the right and found nothing unusual. The next step is to dive under the boat and check out the propellers and shaft. So, we got out our air and I jumped into the water. What a frightening experience. Visibility is less than 1 inch. You literally cannot see anything. I almost couldn’t breath. But I “sucked it

in” and felt my way to the starboard propeller. Everything felt ok, but as I rotated the prop, there was that not-so-sweet grinding sound, only slower. I asked Lynne to go into the engine room and listen for the sound to try and pinpoint the source of the problem. She did, and she did. It turns out that the starboard shaft had separated from the engine. You might ask, “why didn’t butch see this when he was down there?” That would be extremely rude, but I’ll answer anyway. When you go down to my engine room and look right, you’re looking to port. I checked out the port engine and it was fine. (Duh, big red truck...)

If you’ve been paying attention, you will know I was fired as principal mechanic on Aisling, so we called a mechanic to check out the shaft. The local mechanic came right away and put things back together again by 11am so we were able to leave after all, only 4 hours late. Fortunately, we had a short trip planned to Hoppies Marina only 43 miles and 2 locks away. With the help of a 2-2 ½ knot current, we still made it in time for happy hour. Whew!!

Hoppies is an interesting place. It’s essentially a series of small barges strung together parallel to the current that can hold about 20 boats. Mr. and Mrs. Hoppie hold court in a little covered shelter right in the middle. The covered shelter also has moth-eaten sofas and chairs for the use of the visiting boaters for happy hour. They also give lots of advice about where to anchor down river. Very pleasant people. Everyone was happy to see us (about 6 boats went ahead and had heard of our troubles). We came, we stopped, we slept, and tomorrow we’re off again.

It’s tomorrow and we were off at 0-dark-hundred again (0700). It was another long day. We made 112 miles in 9 hours. It’s really great traveling with a 2-3 knot current on your tail. We found the Mississippi River to be pretty tame here. The channel is actually wide enough for two huge barge combinations (15-20 barges) to pass each other with room for us to squeeze by at the same time. Not something you can do while working a crossword puzzle, but not particularly difficult either. At Cape Girardeau there is a small diversion canal that makes an ideal anchorage. We rafted with Fiesta, our new friends from Seattle with a Kroger 48 (I covet their boat). A quiet night and looking forward to another 100 mile day tomorrow.

We have found the Mississippi River to be not nearly as horrible as we were led to believe. I know there are times when the current is extremely high and treacherous, and there are times when the water is dangerously low, but we seem to have hit it just right. The 2-3 knot current sometimes swirls and gives us steering challenges, but usually it’s just fast. As I said before, the channel is wide enough for us to easily stay out of the way of the barges and the barge captains are pleasant and appreciate our efforts to communicate when we call them. All in all, somewhat monotonous, but not totally unpleasant.

I think it’s Sunday and we hope this will be our last long day for a while. We decided to try to make it to Paducah which means making 95 miles and passing through 2 locks. With our bad luck with locks so far on the rivers, I wasn’t sure we would even come close. We just barely made it to the Big E Marina as the sun was setting. It was another fascinating day on the river. We made great time for the first 52 miles down the Mississippi. At one time our 8 knot boat was making 13 knots. It changed dramatically when we turned the corner and headed up the Ohio River at Cairo. Suddenly, instead of 12-13 knots, we’re going 6-7 knots. This is what made the day so long. Then came the first lock and we saw no less than 8 barge combinations waiting to

lock up. I called the lock operator to find out how many days we would have to wait for all these waiting barges. Eureka!!! We were in luck. The lock operator told us we could lock up within a half hour. How could that be with 8 barges waiting in line? That's a story in itself.

With the amount of commercial traffic on this river, the lock operators must find the most efficient way to lock through these barges. Since they move so slowly and they are so large, it isn't efficient to lock barge A down, then barge B up, etc. Instead, they lock barge A down, then refill the lock and lock barge C down, then refill the lock, etc. After locking down 5 or so barges, they reverse the process and start locking up barges B, D, F, etc. Understand? Now, how does that apply to pleasure boats. We're small and quick. If the lock operator is locking down barges, they don't mind fitting in pleasure boats going up. And THAT's why we were lucky. We were actually double lucky because we went through with a Coast Guard work boat who was traveling at the same speed so they arrived at the next lock when we arrived. I had a long chat on the radio with the Coast Guard captain along the way. When he told me he was planning to lock up, I told him we were hoping he would get us in the lock with him. Of course, the significance of this is that government vessels get first priority, so it doesn't matter what the status of the lock is, they have to work in the Coast Guard boat, and hence, yours truly. Double lucky.

After all that, we arrived at the fabulous Big E Marina at 7pm, just as the sun was setting. Big E Marina is worthy of note. It's made up of about 20 barges all strung together and attached to shore by steel cables. To get ashore, you have to negotiate a steel walkway about ¼ mile long and 200 feet high. And this was a sight for sore eyes at 7 pm as the sun was setting.

We hope the super-long days are behind us. With only 42 miles to cover on Tuesday to Green Turtle Bay on Barkley Lake, we slept in and didn't get underway until 11 am. We made our 42 miles and locked up the largest lock so far – 57 feet without incident. After a quiet night at the Green Turtle Marina, we continued the next 10 miles to the boat yard to haul out and check out the starboard shaft. The question is, why did it come out of the coupler in Alton and why does it wobble so much.

OK! After over 2 weeks in the yard, everything looks to be in fine shape. When we hauled the boat out of the water, the first thing we discovered was that the starboard cutlass bearing was shot. The theory is that the line that was wrapped around the shaft way back in the Georgian Bay melted and blocked water flow around the bearing. Water flow is needed to keep the bearing from overheating. The bearing was shot, the prop was out of shape, and the shaft was bent. Two boat units later (1 bu = \$1000), everything works great. No wobble; no vibration. Whew! I cannot say enough nice things about the Rottgering Marine Boat Yard. They were great – timely, honest, competent.

We got back to the boat on Friday, October 11, 2002, and were joined by Lynne's brother, Stewart and his girlfriend, Candy. They spent the next three days cruising slowly up the Tennessee River. Short days, beautiful anchorages, great meals, and good company. It's hard to take. We covered about 100 miles in 3 days, and put in to Birdsong Marina for the next couple of days. It turned out to be quite a diamond in the rough – Pearl really.

Birdsong Marina is the site of the only pearl farm in the U.S. They culture thousands of mussels each year to encourage them to produce beautiful pearls. And, of course, we had to buy some. Lynne got a necklace and matching earrings. And we got “her most precious self” a bracelet. If you don’t know who “her most precious self” is, you haven’t been paying attention.

We stayed there an extra day to take advantage of an invitation from the owner to join a tour of the “farm”. Then, on Friday, we’re off again, but didn’t get far. The weather forecast called for heavy rain over the weekend, so I swallowed my pride and battled off my cheapness and we put into another marina on the Tennessee River. This time we stopped at Mermaid Marina. We hit it lucky this time. It seems the owner of the Marina is also a Gulfstar owner and he has the generous policy of allowing fellow Gulfstars to stay in the marina for free the first night. So, we paid a whopping \$28 for the second night and settled in for the rains. Later we met Rena and Pete Boyd who have a houseboat in the Marina. Rena and Pete make it a habit of befriending poor transients and took us out to dinner both Friday and Saturday and gave us lunch on Sunday. Pete really wants to cruise, but Rena’s not so sure. We tried to give her our best face so maybe she’ll reconsider.

The weather got rainy and cold, so we decided to spend the weekend at Mermaid watching ballgames, finally leaving on Monday to head up the river. Next stop was a quiet anchorage behind Diamond Island (mile 195). Easy anchoring, good holding, well protected. From there, its only 10 miles to the Pickwick Lock and Dam. With a 2 knot current, it took us nearly 2 hours to make the lock the next day, but had a minimal wait (maybe the lock gods are turning our way again). One hour later we were nicely tied at Aqua Marina at the start of the Tenn-Tom waterway. Normally, we don’t spend so much time in marinas, but we really needed to make it to a grocery store and Aqua Marina has a courtesy car. As we entered Pickwick Lake we were taken aback by its beauty. After hundreds of miles of river dominated by barges and industry, Pickwick Lake was a breath of fresh air. We really should have anchored in Pickwick. There’s a zillion beautiful anchorages there. If you’re looking at our accounts to help you plan your trip, plan to anchor in Pickwick before going into the Tenn Tom. You can go to the grocery store down the river. But we had a marina mindset and stopped at Aqua. It’s a nice facility with the means to fix any problem.

The weather has been terrible since we started up the Tennessee and continues to be bad. It alternates between rain and heavy overcast. If it isn’t raining we move. If it is raining we stay. Wednesday it wasn’t raining so off we went to Bay Springs Lake. It was a fairly short day, but Bay Springs Lake was a recommended anchorage, and it was very nice, but again the weather prevented us from enjoying it as we would have liked. There’s lots of places to anchor, but we elected to drop the hook near the marina. It turns out that there’s no compelling reason to be near the Marina, and if we come back, we’ll pick a more remote anchorage. While we were there, we met a very interesting couple who had just bought a 65 foot paddlewheel-driven boat. I went aboard and got a tour and it was really interesting. The boat is really driven by a paddlewheel. The owners were Joe and Rosa; ironically the same first names as Lynne’s parents.

We had planned to stay in Bay Springs for an extra day, but Thursday morning it was overcast and cool – another crummy day – so we decided to move on. Maybe later we’ll have a nice

sunny day to sit at anchor and play with the dingy. I heard a barge captain announce his arrival at the top of the lake about 8 miles away and decided to hurry away to try to beat him to the lock. Pleasure boats are LAST in the locking hierarchy, so we needed to beat the barge by a wide margin to get locked through. We made it and again, it appears that the locking gods are smiling on us as we went through 3 locks today and didn't have to wait for any of them. The first lock of the day was our largest elevation change of the entire trip, 84 feet. It was also one of the fastest locks we've been in. It felt like an elevator as it dropped us 84 feet in 15 minutes. To do this it had to be releasing 25,000,000 gallons of water per minute. After a short run and record luck with the locking gods we put into Midway Marina in Fulton, Mississippi and WENT TO THE WALMART. Remember this, cruisers. Fulton has a SUPER WALMART.

We're having a little problem with the weather. The weather in Mississippi has been worst than anything we have encountered since we started cruising two years ago. Nothing dangerous, but just rain, showers, clouds, and more rain nearly every day for over two weeks. Lynne and I don't like traveling in the rain for two reasons. First, everything gets wet. Second, we get wet (this part we like the least). In the past, we had a simple rule. If we thought it would rain, we just stayed put and waited till the next day. Here, that hasn't worked 'cause it's gonna rain the next day, too. Anyway, we decided to spend an extra day in Fulton because they had a SUPER WALMART and an extremely friendly management. We also decided to use the marina Laundromat for a change.

We made some new friends in Fulton. Bob and Enga from Free Spirit and Mike and Barbara from Lady Barbara. They convinced us that Columbus was a worth stop so we changed our plans to anchor out between Fulton and Marina Cove (we have mail coming to Marina Cove) and decided to go into the Columbus Marina with our new friends. Also influencing our decision is the prediction of more rain with some storms. If we can be tied up for \$25-30 in a storm, we'll take it. After Columbus our next stop was a marina known as Marina Cove. Frankly, Marina Cove is only 30 miles from Columbus, so we wouldn't have stopped there if it hadn't been for the fact that they had our mail, including our next installment of rebuilt alternator, a remnant from THE WEEK FROM HELL.

In the three days we traveled from Bay Springs to Marina Cove we traveled 110 miles and went through 8 locks. The locks were all easy. All these locks have floating bollards (a bollard is a gizmo you can tie your boat to). All you have to do is secure the boat to the floating bollard and watch it go down as the lock operator lets the water out. These are definitely the easiest locks we've encountered so far in our travels. The lock operators have been accommodating as well because we've had very little waiting at the locks – a far cry from the experience we had on the Illinois River.

Our next marina stop will be Demopolis, which is 93 miles and 2 locks from Marina Cove. Most of the boats at Marina Cove got up at O-Dark-Hundred to make it in one day. We decided to split the trip into two days and spend a day on the hook. It was another rainy day, of course, but we found a beautiful anchorage which we shared with 5 other boats. Again, we had lots of rain, but it didn't rain on us in the locks and there was little or no wind.

All the rain has caused the level of the river to rise – we're in the Tenn Tom waterway and the Tombigbee River. When a river rises, the water picks up debris from the bank and floats it downstream. That means the river is inundated with floating vegetation, floating logs, and occasional logs floating beneath the surface. I think the marinas along the river here, make their main living replacing propellers and propeller shafts on boats that hit a log in the river. We meandered through the debris fields and only hit two logs – so far. Thank goodness – no damage.

We arrived at Demopolis on Tuesday, October 29 and stayed nearly a week. Our son Brian brought our grandchildren to see us for Halloween and they were the hit of the dock. All the local boaters got a great kick out of seeing two pretend people trick or treating along the dock. When we finally left the following Monday, we had only 3 days to make it to Mobile in time for the Great Looper's rendezvous.

Once again, we must push ourselves because of a combination of terrible weather and commitments. We left Demopolis at predawn, hoping against hope that we can make it 116 miles to a recommended anchorage at mile 100. It was not to be. We wound up waiting in the lock for 30 minutes for a couple of boaters that didn't get up as early as we did, but did get up in time to get the lock keeper to wait for them. That killed any chance of our making it beyond Bobby's Fish Camp at mile 218. Still, we made 98 miles that day plus the Demopolis lock and got there just before dark. The weather was not good, but at least the rain chose not to fall on us as we sat in the lock or as we docked at Bobby's. Next day, we took off at predawn again because everyone at Bobby's wanted to make it through the lock early and we had them pretty well blocked in so we all left together at 545 am (Can you believe Lynne agreed to get up that early 2 days in a row? I wonder what this is going to cost me down the road.) The Coffeeville lock we went through at 0-dark-hundred put us back at sea level for the first time since June 18. Altogether we made 112 miles this day and finally got to anchor out without worry. We found a nice anchorage at mile 10, leaving us only 2 ½ hours to go to get to Eastern Shore Marina and the Loopers' Rendezvous.

The Looper's Rendezvous was a blast. We made a whole bunch of new friends, some of whom we'd been traveling with for a couple of weeks without meeting them. We also renewed our acquaintance with Ron and Eva Stob, authors of "Honey, Let's Get a Boat" and originators of the "Looper's Club", AGLCA. Ron and Eva are a delightful couple and reason enough to attend these events. Besides breakfasts, lunches, cocktail hours and dinners every day of the three day event, we also did some really intelligent activities. On day 2 we did a poker run with our dingies. We teamed up with couples from 3 other boats, all in tow up the creek in search of our poker hands. Lynne had the 9, J, Q, K of spades. Unfortunately, her 5th card was the 5 of clubs. No wonder she hates to play cards.

On day 3 we had a very interesting dingy race. In the first leg the rower wore a blindfold and had to be directed by the crew. In our case Lynne was giving me directions. Now, I have to say that normally Lynne and I communicate extremely well and without resorting to nastiness, but on this day, we must have been a sight to see because we couldn't get our lefts and rights and ports and starboards in sync and ended up going in the opposite direction from where we were suppose

to go. At least we were able to stay friends afterward and we didn't come in last. The couples that we beat must have been particularly pathetic.

It was a wonderful three days. I hope we'll be able to attend another Looper's rendezvous some day. In our next leg, we'll be cruising the panhandle of Florida, crossing the "bend" to Tampa, and settling down for a couple of months.

Stay tuned.

WESTERN FLORIDA

While we've never been to this part of the Intracoastal before, it feels like we're finally home again. We loved the months of cruising in fresh water and the wonderful variety of the rivers, canals and lakes of the past 4 months, but somehow, the salt water of the ICW feels like home. No more rocks that we know of, nice forgiving muddy bottoms with easy holding for the anchor. Predictable channels with red on the right – except when it's on the left. The ICW tow boats, intimidating a year ago, look like toys compared to the monsters we encountered on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Home again. Fresh shrimp, oysters and crabs, when you can get them. Home again.

We're traveling with a new group of friends that we made in Fairhope. We actually met from time to time as we cruised down the Tenn-Tom, but didn't get to know each other until Fairhope. Our new friends are Harry and Karen of "Chinook", Tom and Patsy of "True North", and Bruce and Cindy of "Island Time". We were accused of forming a "click" because we tended to stick together while we waited for favorable weather to leave Fairhope, but we didn't. We just got along. Tom and Patsy are just finishing the Great Loop. They left Pensacola a year ago and will be stopping there in just a few days. We all left Fairhope on Wednesday, November 13 and headed for Ingram Bayou. We're back into the mode of relaxing cruising, we hope since there is very little to drive our schedule at this point. Lynne and I plan to fly out of Pensacola on the 26th to spend Thanksgiving with "Her most precious self" and "His eminence". We're already close enough to Pensacola to get there when we need to, so we don't have to rush anywhere.

We covered the 41 miles to Ingram Bayou and anchored there with Chinook and Island Time. True North had another obligation and stopped short. We had a series of tearful goodbyes with Tom and Patsy as they didn't expect to see us again. But we had a surprise for them. Ingram Bayou was such a beautiful anchorage, we all decided to stay there an extra day and wait for True North to get there the next day. We busied ourselves by taking the short trip to Pirates Cove in nearby Roberts Bayou for cheeseburgers. This is where Jimmy Buffet wrote his song "Cheeseburger in Paradise". The cheeseburgers were mediocre, but the experience was great. True North arrived late in the afternoon, and we all rafted for a series of tearful hellos.

Friday we all started out again to parade to True North's berth – more tearful goodbyes – and made our way to Pensacola to the city marina there. Guess who met us there – Tom and Patsy left True North in her berth and drove to Pensacola to party with us. We rented a van together

and went to the Pensacola Naval Air Station Museum, a highly recommended stop. It was worth the trouble. More tearful goodbyes and we were all off again on Monday.

Our destination now is actually Panama City. We have a slip reserved there for the holidays and hope to meet up with CeaJay there. We haven't seen them since Joliet on the Illinois River. It's 113 miles from Pensacola to Panama City and we're anxious to get there, so we covered the distance in 2 days, stopping in Destin overnight on Monday night. There are so many anchorages to choose from in this area, we could have stopped just about anywhere we wanted and could easily have taken a week to cover these 113 miles – probably should have, but we still haven't learned how to relax.

Aisling stayed in Panama City just over 2 weeks. We rested, cleaned, visited the precious ones, golfed relaxed. As we contemplated our next destination, what loomed ahead of us was crossing the Gulf of Mexico to Tampa Bay. This crossing involves the portion of Florida called the Big Bend and since there is no protected waterway in this area, you're required to go out into the Gulf of Mexico to traverse it. I'm told it's a great cruising area if you have a shallow draft boat and you aren't traveling through it in the late fall when the north winds drive the water out of the Gulf of Mexico and leave the coastal areas uncommonly shallow. The dilemma that faces all cruisers is whether to go straight to Tarpon Springs (the beginning of the west coast ICW), a 20 hour trip in our boat or hop around the coast and brave the shallow rivers along the way. As we left Panama City, we still hadn't decided what to do. We left on Wednesday, headed for Carrabelle which is at the end of the ICW and the point of decision. Our next possible weather window will be on Sunday so we can take our time getting there.

Wednesday we covered 40 miles to White City, Florida. There's nothing there but a free dock, but we love a free dock. CeaJay got there ahead of us and walked the town (one quick-shop). We never stepped off the dock. Next day took us to Apalachicola, home of the Apalachicola oyster. Tied to the city dock for \$20. I don't recommend it. It's poorly protected from the north and prevailing current. I'm pretty sure we were aground at low tide and had a hard time getting off two days later because the current had us pinned on the dock. There are marinas there and a nice anchorage about 7 miles up the river as alternatives.

Saturday, we're off again to cover the 38 miles to Carrabelle and we all have our fingers crossed that the weather will cooperate Sunday and we can get across the Gulf. Aisling and CeaJay anchored just off Dog Island and we plan to leave at 0-dark-hundred on Sunday to go as far as we can. We still haven't decided whether to do some night travel. The anchorage at Dog Island is not well protected from the north, but we figured with the winds reducing through the night would make it a quiet anchorage. NOT! The winds picked up and at 5am the forecast for the next few days is for wind, wind, and more wind. We saw a couple of cruising boats headed out into the Gulf and asked them to report back what kind of conditions they encountered. Well, they didn't get far and later we all gathered in Carrabelle to lick our wounds and wonder when we'd get to cross the Gulf.

This anchorage will not do for north winds, so we hoisted anchor and headed into Carrabelle where we found a nice free dock near the town bar and spent 3 days of tense wondering if we would ever get where we were going. All the guides told us not to wait until December to cross

because the weather fronts move in so close together, you must be very patient to get the right weather. To make matters worst, the Gulf of Mexico is unusual in its tendency to kick up some big seas in winds as low as 10-15 mph so you really have to wait for an offshore forecast of winds less than 10mph. We finally got it on Wednesday, although it wasn't a sure thing. The forecast for Wednesday kept changing from 1-3 foot waves to 2-4 foot waves to 3-5 foot waves. We're looking for 1-3 foot waves. One of the locals told us of a protected anchorage about 20 miles east of Carrabelle we could use if we didn't like the seas as we got that far along so we decided to take a chance. It was a pretty good crossing, though somewhat lumpy. We left later than planned because of the changing forecast so we arrived at the entrance to Steinhatchee (yes, we decided to stay as close to shore as possible since the forecast was so fluky) after dark. We found the entrance well marked and had no trouble piloting the 4-5 miles to the suggested anchorage.

Thursday we left before dawn. We had hoped to go all the way to Tarpon Springs, so we all got up at 4:30, prepared to leave at 5am and off we went. We never got to see Steinhatchie in daylight. Here, the hardest thing was avoiding crabpots. Fortunately, the floats are very reflective. Unfortunately, there are lots and lots of them and you have to keep your spotlight going continuously. Definitely, if you want to travel at night, plan to stay well offshore to avoid these buggers. Daylight came and we had a beautiful, uneventful cruise to Crystal River. We all agreed that the sour afternoon forecast dampened our desire to make the extra 40 miles to Tarpon Springs. We arrived at Crystal River early, but the water was very low. In fact, both Aisling and CeaJay hit a mud "hill" just before we arrived at the marina near town. It was short and we were able to "slither" through it ok, but it set us up for a calamity the following Monday when we tried to make our way past the Crystal Reefs.

Weather for the next few days will be cold and windy and we have good friends from Rascal who live near Crystal River, so we set up to stay there a few days. The anchorage is great, but Lynne and I opted to go into the Marina for \$25/day.

DAY OF DOOM

It was a horrible, terrible, no good, bad day.

The day was Monday, December 16, 2002. Aisling was anchored near the entrance of Crystal River. We had encountered shallow water the previous Thursday on our way into Crystal River at low tide, so we took precautions for our exit on Monday. We left the town at high tide the day before so we could get past the lowest points where we had dragged bottom on our way in. We hadn't encountered any problems at the entrance, so we thought we were "home free". CeaJay and Aisling anchored in the last protected area of the river opposite Green "25". Then, Monday morning we were up early and off for our last required day in open Gulf waters. All was well. The depth ranged from 5 to 12 feet. We were going slightly faster than dead slow in case we encountered a mud bank, so we'd have enough momentum to slither through. Then, suddenly, BANG, #, SCRAPE, *, THUD(@). The boat heeled to the right and scraped along the bottom. Just as suddenly, we were free. What the hell was that? We were between Green 7 and Green 5. I was sure I was in the channel. Famous last words. I think I was in the channel. I'll never

know whether I was in the channel or not. From the first “BANG” I was way too busy to look back.

As soon as we were free, our high-water alarm sounded. Uh Oh..... This is not a good sign. The high-water alarm is set to tell us there's more than a foot of water in the bilge. If we have that much water in the bilge seconds after the “bangscrapethud”, we're sinking fast. Lynne took the wheel and I took off to bilge to see if we were sinking. Deja Vue! Remember, how THE WEEK FROM HELL started? The good news is that we were not sinking. The high water float was not in the water. Hmm. Why was it alarming then? Probably nothing, right? I climbed down into the engine room to check it out. The high-water alarm was mounted on an ell bracket near the wooden floor above the keel. It was folded double and jammed against the wooden floor grates in the keel. I pulled up the floor grate and straightened the bracket and took a closer look. The floor of the keel was oddly “wrinkled” out of shape, and there were signs of water gurgling into the boat. This is not a good sign. There was obvious damage to the keel, and we appeared to be taking on water slowly. This is turning out to be a bad start to a horrible, terrible, no good, bad day.

By this time, we were out in the Gulf of Mexico. This is smart. Let's go out into the middle of the Gulf of Mexico and sink!! At least the seas were calm. Winds were light and friendly from the north. I called Ceajay on the radio, told them what was up, and asked them to come alongside and take a look. Chuck came aboard and we scratched our heads together. Scratch, scratch, scratch. The leak didn't go away. Here we were, already a couple of miles from shore and about 5 miles from the nearest yard. Plus, the nearest yard was in Crystal River, and I wasn't too keen on trying that channel again. Clearly, we were taking on water, but it did appear to be coming in slower than our main bilge pump pumps it out. Our two choices were to hang around Crystal River until the tide rises enough to allow us access to the Crystal River yard, or take off for Tarpon Springs, 50 miles away, and hope we don't sink along the way. We decided to move on. We dropped Chuck overboard and took off as fast as we could.

It was very unlucky to hit whatever we hit, but we were extremely lucky in many other ways. First, our bilge pumps had failed us last year as we were finishing our Florida cruise. I think I even discussed in my log for the last leg of that trip. One of the first things I did last year when we were stopped in Beaufort was to replace all components associated with the bilge, including replacing the anemic main bilge pump with one that would pump at over 13 gallons a minute and adding a secondary pump that pumps about 5 gallons a minute plus a spare 5gpm pump in storage. That saved us. I figure the water was coming in at a pace of about 11 gallons a minute. So, as long as the hole(s) didn't get worse, and as long as our main bilge pump didn't give out, we would make it without sinking. Our second stroke of luck was that we were traveling with Ceajay, good friends you can count on in a pinch. We were pretty sure they would save us if the boat sank. Actually, even if the boat sank, we were never in more than 12 feet of water and our roof is 20 feet above the keel so we weren't in any immediate danger, just Aisling. Our third stroke of luck was TowBoat US. I called them immediately upon discovering our dilemma, and while we never had to have them come out to us, they had stations at four locations in our path (none of the locations between Crystal River and Tarpon Springs were deep enough for us to access, but they had stations there anyway) and all the stations were standing by with large bilge pumps in case they were needed. They were a huge psychological help to us. I can't say enough

wonderful things about TowBoat US. They also located a good yard in Tarpon Springs and had them standing by with a lift ready to take us out of the water.

We had lots of good luck, but our bad luck hadn't run out either. The impact on the bottom had broken loose the float switch that operates our main bilge pump. It was floating freely in the water, randomly turning on and off. So, for 5 hours, we alternated pumps manually every 5 minutes. First, we would run the primary and secondary pumps until the bilge was nearly dry. We ran the primary by tying the manual switch on (it's a momentary switch so you have to either hold it on or tie it off somewhere). Then turn the primary off, leave the secondary on (it ran for the entire 5 hours). To maximize the "rest" period for the primary, I had connected the spare pump to a garden hose and spare battery and would turn it on for the primary's rest period. Then turn the spare off while the primary was running to conserve the spare's battery. This process was a pain in the ass.

But it did work. When we arrived at Tarpon Springs at 2 pm, all the bilge pumps were still operational. TowBoat US was waiting for us at the entrance to the Anclote River to lead us to the yard waiting for us. We drove right into the sling, and finally could breathe a sigh of relief.

CeaJay arrived about an hour later to make sure we were going to be okay and continued on their way. Meanwhile, they had called John and Maedell of Rascal, whom we had been visiting in Crystal River and they dropped what they were doing to drive down and rescue us. Boy, it's nice to have good friends.

Here's the bottom line. The damage was a 25 foot gash on the bottom/port corner of the keel. The keel will have to be completely reconstructed from the outside. Fuel tanks and water tanks prevent access to the inside of the keel, except for the few feet in the engine room. Total cost estimate is \$9400. Estimated repair time is 30 days. Glad we have insurance. Looks like BoatUS won't be making a profit on us this year.

We ended up going home with John and Maedell and after a couple of days of reorganizing, took off for South Carolina for the holidays, returning from time to time to check on repair progress.