

Mayday Aboard *Black Pearl*

by Allison Periconi



The crew of *Black Pearl*: Jay Dayton, Richard Slaughter, Arnie Boughner, Allison Periconi and Braden Loveless.

board tack long enough to settle down and get everything straight. We then jibed onto port tack and headed towards the leeward mark.

Once again, it took a few minutes to get ourselves situated and settled in to this point of sail. We were screaming downwind! The winds were definitely up even more and we were surfing down the building waves. We took a couple of small knock-downs as the gusts tried to round *Pearl* up but we managed to recover each time. Jay was letting out some of his signature “Woo-hoo’s!” At one point the chute folded momentarily and when it slammed back full again, the topping lift snapped. We elected to use the jib halyard as a temporary pole lift and that switch was made quickly and successfully.

As we approached the leeward mark, we started preparing early to get our jib up and take down the spinnaker. However, we were going to need to remove the jib halyard from the pole and put it back on the sail. This required some ease on the guy but there was extreme pressure on the pole and the jaw would not fully retract. We attempted to ease the down guy but unfortunately the moment it was uncleated, we were hit with a huge gust. The pole skied, the chute went out further and oscillated leeward which sent us into an immediate, full-on broach. As we lay on our side waiting for the keel to right us, the waves threw tremendous amounts of water into the cockpit filling her to the seats in one swift movement. We tried frantically to blow the spin halyard and begin to pump and bail. Before we could do so, another huge wave of water came pouring in and she was filled to just below the cockpit combings. At this point it was obvious that we were in danger of sinking.

When the stern began to go under, Jay grabbed his handheld submersible VHF radio and began issuing Maydays as we all started treading in the 60-65 degree water. Fortunately, *Black Pearl* settled upright in the mud leaving Jay, Richard, Arnie and me a few feet of mast to cling to. Braden had been swept away from the boat with a floating floor board to hang on to. (Happy Birthday!) Hearing the Mayday on channel 71, Harry Seemans and the Clark brothers dropped their sails and came to our aid, plucking Braden out of the river. It was too difficult for them to get any

closer to us, though.



Black Pearl at the bottom of the Choptank

At the same time, the Race Committee boat *Alexa* was making its way towards us. They threw out an orange hippity hop allowing us to grab its line and be pulled to their boat. Needless to say, we were all very cold and exhausted from the pounding waves and being overboard in full foul weather gear. The event happened so quickly that none of us had a chance to put on life preservers but luckily, we were now all safe. The RC did an excellent job of retrieving us, getting us into dry clothes and patching up our only injury... a gash under Arnie’s

eye from the swim ladder on the platform of the power boat. Many, many thanks go out to the RC crew of Tom Seip, Pat Shehan, Rollin Brown, Linda Laramy, Emily Knud-Hansen and the crews of Harry Seemans' and the Clark brothers' boats.

Plans were made for salvage and recovery efforts to happen the next day with assistance from *TowJamm*. Two divers went down and derigged the boat underwater. Six air bags were then used to bring her back to the surface. Pumps were used to get out all the water and she was towed back to the Club. She went down at about noon on Saturday and 24 hours later she was back up again.

Luckily, *Black Pearl* sustained only some minor damage. We all got our bags back, minus a few working cell phones, and even the cooler came back still fully stocked! I don't think the seriousness of that event really hit me until that night and into the coming days. I am still wondering to myself, "Did that really just happen?" There are moments that I will probably never forget... the pressure on my lungs as my core contracted to keep warm in the water, Jay's voice issuing the Maydays, the look in Braden's eyes as he was washed further from the boat and the sad sight of leaving *Pearl* behind when we headed back to the Club. I think we all learned a lot that day about sailing... and about ourselves.



Black Pearl returning to port