



Ordinary sailors doing extraordinary things is an elixir for the spirit

I promised myself that I wouldn't write about the most recent America's Cup, in part because I was so livid about the attempted hijacking of the Cup by its previous holder, and in part because the legal wrangling had become so excruciating. Watching two billionaires pee on each other's shoes, no matter who was right, lost its amusement value several years ago.

The whole thing left a bad taste in my mouth, and took some of the shine off sailing for me. But I have found something that, if it could be bottled, would replace Lavoris for getting rid of that bad taste.

Most of us who sail are ordinary people. Our lives are without drama, without fuss. Up in the morning, off to work, often barely able to wait for the weekend to go sailing. And that's all well and good.

But occasionally ordinary people are thrust into extraordinary situations, and the results can be heartwarming and inspiring. Otherwise average sailors can, in an instant, suddenly become heroes. This isn't about stepping into a phone booth and putting on a superhero suit. It's about responding in a way that upholds the oldest tradition of the sea: sailors always, always! help other sailors in distress.

Aboard his 32-foot catamaran, *Rainbow*, Clifford Shaw was 20 miles off San Francisco near the Farallon Islands, following a double-handed multihull race. He was struggling with 12-foot seas and winds gusting to 30 knots when he saw another boat sailing erratically, with no one on deck. He spotted two swimmers in the 50-degree water. He immediately started his engine and, when he was near, threw them a Lifesling, but it fell short. He then circled the men until they could grab the towed Lifesling. With the engine off, he and his single crew wrestled

the men aboard *Rainbow*, saving their lives. For this, the US Sailing Safety-at-Sea Committee awarded them the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal for their actions.

Just ordinary people.

During a race off Hawaii in a 25-knot blow, skipper Joe Cochrane of the Cal-20, *Ol' Blue*, went overboard. Suffering from the early stages of Lou Gehrig's disease, he was immediately in trouble, but the two crewmembers aboard took immediate action. One grabbed the helm and turned back toward their skip-

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per, the other went into the water to keep his head above water. Seeing the crisis, two other Cal-20s and an International 14 dropped out of their races to assist. The I-14 skipper alerted a Kaneohe Bay Yacht Club rescue boat by VHF and, when it arrived, two crewmembers from the Cal-20s boarded the powerboat and pulled the two sailors aboard and treated Cochrane, who recovered after several days in the hospital.

The Hanson Rescue Medal is awarded to the yacht and inscribed with the crew names so, for their seamanship and rescue, medals were awarded for the actions of the *Ol' Blue* crew, to the powerboat and its crew, including those from the Cal-20s, and a third to the International 14.

All just ordinary people.

After an offshore race, skipper Robert Gordenker was sailing his J/35, *Time Machine*, back to the club when, in 25-knot headwinds and rough seas, he spotted a paddle being waved above the water. A father and son were clinging to a

capsized *Flying Junior* in the water. Gordenker and his crew doused their sails and executed a perfect approach alongside the small boat in spite of the seas, hauling one aboard by hand before they drifted away. On their second approach, they retrieved the other man. Both had been in the icy water for nearly an hour, and were on the edge of hypothermia, but the *Time Machine* crew assessed their condition and treated them properly. During the entire time, Gordenker kept the Canadian Coast Guard apprised of the

situation with calm radio transmissions, which can be heard on <http://tmsailing.blogspot.com>. Gordenker and the crew of *Time Machine* received the Hanson Rescue Medal.

Just ordinary people.

On Long Island Sound, Michael Bruno Jr. was practicing for his club spring series aboard his 40-foot J/122, *Wings*, with a crew of nine aboard. In winds gusting 25 (is there a pattern here?), lumpy seas, and chill 40-degree water temperatures, a crewmember slipped overboard during a tack. Immediately one crewmember took responsibility for watching the swimmer while *Wings* reached away, jibed and returned. It was a textbook example of seamanship as Bruno luffed to a stop alongside the crewman in the water and he was muscled aboard just three minutes after he went over. For their exemplary recovery, *Wings* and her crew earned the Hanson Rescue Medal.

Ordinary people.

For Wally McMinn, it was just he and his wife aboard *Odyssey*, their

Catalina 400, as they motorsailed just after sunset on Lake Erie. Somehow, they heard a faint cry from a man with a capsized kayak. McMinn deployed a Lifesling, but the man couldn't hold onto it. He then tossed a throw rope and pulled the man to the boat, getting him aboard via the swim ladder. Facing a night in the chill water, the man survived because of McMinn's alertness, and *Odyssey* was awarded the Hanson Rescue Medal.

More ordinary people.

My friend, nautical historian and writer John Rousmaniere, has resuscitated the Arthur Hanson Rescue Medal program this year, after it had gone unawarded for two years simply because of a lack of nominations and a lack of volunteer help at US Sailing.

I know that the Hanson Rescue Medal awards I mentioned are just the tip of the iceberg, and that many other equally worthy incidents take place every time sailors are on the water. Some of those above almost went unnoticed, with the rescued sailors simply being dropped off on shore with no television crews or flashbulbs to immortalize the event.

Anyone, club or individual, can make a nomination for the award, which recognizes those who rescued or endeavored to rescue others from the perils of the sea. In addition to celebrating the heroes amongst us, the nominations are also used by the Safety-at-Sea committee as case studies for US Sailing educational programs.

As I said, it's heartwarming to find that ordinary people, just sailors like you and I, can use their training, often dredged from years back, to save lives when the chips are down.

Their stories are a wonderful antidote to listening to billionaires bicker over a bottomless silver mug.