

F L O T I L L A C R O S S I N G ' 9 6

A JOURNAL OF THE

2nd
Annual
Flotilla
Crossing
'96

By
Pam Rice, Flotilla Commander

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Book One

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Chapter One

Saturday, August 10, 1996

The flotilla left Jackson Park Yacht Club at 9:30 p.m. The seas were choppy, with easterly winds. It was a dark night—no moon, no stars. At the horizon it was hard to distinguish the sky from the lake.

We were headed 72 degrees southeast to Michigan City, IN; from there, north to St. Joseph, MI, South Haven, and then onto Saugatuck.

Just for the record, I need to introduce the flotilla participants: *Purple Reigns*—Captain Pam Rice, Fleet Commander and Captain Wanda Robertson, skipper of *My Tyme*

Alpha Rays — Captain Alpha Ray Thompson, Rear Admiral of this flotilla.

Aloha—Captain Roger Shumpert; First Mate Diane Shumpert; Captain Lance Lovely, skipper of *Seeking*

Sea Horse — Captain Wesley “Smitty” Smith

Aminah — Captain Elliott El-Amin

J-Runner — Captain Johnny Johnson (*who will sail from East Chicago and join us in St. Joseph*).

Most of us in this flotilla are experienced sailors. Pam Rice and Wesley Smith were members of the first

African-American crew (of both men and women) to sail in the Mackinac Race in 1994. The crew of nine was captained by Captain William "Bill" Pinkney, world-renown, solo-circum-navigator. The boat Upanayana (*Keeper of the Magic Flute*) was that of David Blackwell, also of the crew. Rose Rogers and Robert Bassett are both active members of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Lance Lovely, an experienced yachtsman and mechanic. Myself and Wanda Roberston with twenty plus years of sailing experience; David and Judith Davis sailed the east coast for many years and shipped *Obsession* to Chicago to sail Lake Michigan where they currently reside. Al Thompson and Yvonne Nelson have sailed the entire Lake Michigan and part of Lake Superior. They have sailed for 40 days and nights at a time to various islands and through the Straits of Mackinaw, the North Channel and up into Canada.

Aloha is out in front, *Smitty of Sea Horse*, then Elliott of *Aminah*. Both raised their main and jib sails and took a southerly tack. *Alpha Rays* is trailing behind *Purple Reigns* until a few miles east of the crib. We unfurled our jib to smoothen our ride, and took a southeasterly tack. This took us further south than our usual approach into Michigan City.

The southern coast of Lake Michigan was in view the entire trip. The night was black, but the coastal lights gave us direction. Each city along the way had a warm glow of lights.

We increased our speed from 4.1 knots to about 5 knots, in order to get to Michigan City before sunrise.

A crescent fluorescent orange glow was in the north-easterly skies right at the horizon. We all thought it

was a spinnaker. The night's sky was still much too dark for it to be the rising sun. We all watched intensely looking for more movement. Could it have been the moon? It had to be, it was, *still*, dark. Maybe this was one of those strange phoenominas? It could have been a harvest moon that, then, disappeared behind the clouds.

We noticed a sailboat fast approaching from the west. We thought perhaps it was someone from Jackson Park trying to catch up with us. *Alpha Rays* called it "the boat with no name". The boat, eventually, dropped far behind us. We never saw who it was, or why they were approaching us so quickly, only to retreat.

A large cargo ship passed us at our stern about 1/2 mile west. We saw the large ship put a spotlight on "the boat with no name". This was the last we saw of this sailboat. Radio contact with the rest of the flotilla echoed everyone's concerns. We radioed the furthest boat in the flotilla, to see if the boat was visible—negative.

Approximately, 4:00 a.m., we were approaching the entrance to Michigan City. *Aminah* and *Alpha Rays* had taken the northerly entrance. *Purple Reigns* was at the southerly entrance, which was unfamiliar to us. The seas were very choppy. After furling in the jib, we came to almost a stand-still. The light at this entrance wasn't on. We had no spotlight. Our sails were down and now our ride was very rough. I was really uncomfortable with this. Entering unfamiliar harbors at night can be *very* unnerving.

I spotted red and green entrance lights, but still did not feel right. I radioed Elliot and Al to see if they would come back out and escort us into the harbor— but they chose to talk us in. What they were saying did not make

sense. I was headed for the entrance lights, but little did I know there was a beach and break wall between the lights. We were motoring "blind". Just as Elliot began talking us in, the light of dawn gave us direction. In situation like this, it is best to stay out until daybreak.

Once in, we docked on "the wall". We had been sailing for seven hours and was time to turn in and try to get a few hours of sleep.

Chapter Two

We were awakened by a loud rap on the boat. It was the security guard who wanted us to check in at the office. The office was about 2 blocks away. Needless to say, we told him that we would register, in a few hours. We had just arrived and wanted to get some sleep. He insisted that we get up immediately and sign in. (*There was much controversy than I dare mention.*) When we got up to walk to the office, he was not there and the office was closed. (*There was more said about this than I dare say.*) Half way back, we past him, and he told us to turn around and walk back. In so many words, I told him that I would eventually come back over, but the walk was much too long. Well, he became an aggravation to us at that point He threatened to call the police. I told him to call the police *and* the Coast Guard. The issue was, whether the wall we were docked on was Federal or local property. He insisted that it was local. The Coast Guard would solve this. When the police arrived, they concurred that the security guard had been rather harsh and unreasonable and the Coast Guard did too. Obviously, this guard was on a 'power trip', after all, he was working and we were playing. To him, something was wrong with *this* picture. They explained to the guard that the wall had been federal, but

had been recently acquired by local government. We thanked the Coast Guard and moved to another location.

After this altercation, we moved up the river, south of the yacht club—this was more comfortable, *anyway*. We called it “Tom’s Place”. You see— there was a sign that read “For Sale, Call Tom at”.

J-Runner arrives.

* * *

About 11:00 a.m., we biked and roller bladed to breakfast to M & M. M & M is a restaurant that serves ‘home-cooking’ and is located in a deserted strip mall. On the way back, we took a scenic route. Here, there are serious hills, where bikes just cannot be ridden. Some of us biked, the rest of us walked up to the tower by the zoo. Here lies plateaus of sand and trees. When you reach the base of the tower, which is quite a ways up, there is a magnificent view. The ground must not be stable enough here for construction. If it was, I’m sure this would have been developed. Narrow steps lead to the top of the tower. I agreed to watch all of the bikes below and let the energetic folks go to the top of the lookout tower.

Our bike decent was very steep. The trick was to traverse the street, this was the only safe way down. Besides, my brakes weren’t all that good. Most of us walked our bikes.

We stopped by B+E marina on our way back to the boats. I bought a spotlight, because we had a long way up the coast.

There were about six boats that arrived from Jackson Park Harbor for the Raske Race (*a race from*

Michigan City to Jackson Park). Festivities were planned for that evening.

Sunday, August 11, 1996

7:25 a.m. the flotilla left Michigan City for South Haven. *Aminah* was soloing. *Purple Reigns* followed by *Alpha Rays*, *Sea Horse* and *J-Runner* out front. We bid farewell to Captain Frank Garner and Captain Ted Graves (both from Jackson Park) as we motored past the Michigan City Yacht Club.

Mains and jibs were raised. There was good easterly winds, averaging approximately 5 - 6 knots. *Sea Horse* fell back, a mile behind us. While we waited on *Sea Horse* to catch up and took this time for photo opportunities. Roger, Diane and Elliott were video recording. Me and Wanda increased our speed to catch them. *Sea Horse* and *Aloha* later decided to go out a mile or so, to catch some wind.

Aminah, *Purple Reigns* and *Alpha Rays* were sailing close together. Close enough to have conversations with each other.

The wind died about 11:00 a.m. At 1:00 p.m. we were approaching St. Joseph. *Alpha Rays* rolled in his furling—*por quoi?* (Maybe he forgot we were not pulling in here). Our timing was good—we passed St. Joe and continued on to South Haven.

About 2:45 p.m. — Dead calm.

By this time, *Aminah* was way out in front, *Alpha Rays* was not far behind him; *Aloha* is off our port-side and *Sea Horse* is off our portside stern.

The day was hazy and humid. South Haven appeared to be about eight miles away— 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hours time?

* * *

We spent that evening in South Haven.

Elliott's family had arrived in their motor home. They would join us for the sail north and be dropped off on our return. This was the way they often traveled. It gave everyone a chance to enjoy the trip.

Chapter Three

Monday, August 12, 1996

This day was beautiful. The sun was out, the sky was blue. Everyone went about their own ways, by bike or by foot, folks traveled into town. Wanda and I visited the local thrift shops and discount stores. Later that afternoon, I decided to change the oil on *Purple Reigns*. After having several people trying to find the oil filter, we were told that that particular Yanmar didn't have an oil filter. I, then, borrowed Smitty's oil pump to change the oil.

Later that evening, we gathered down-below on *Purple Reigns* and discussed our plans for the following day. We would sail north, past Saugatuck to South Holland and spend some time and then return to Saugatuck.

Tuesday, August 13, 1996

We departed at 7:45 a.m. for South Holland. Smitty is behind to make a phone call and *Aminah* is at the fuel pump. We wait for all to catch up.

We passed Saugatuck.

The winds were light. It was sunny and hot.

Everyone used a main sail except for *Alpha Rays*. *J-Runner*, *Purple Reigns* and *Aloha* sported about one-third of our jibs. There was no wind. About noon—our heading was between 11 and 14 degrees.

We all arrived in South Holland at 1:00 p.m., averaging 5 knots. *J-Runner* had arrived about twenty minutes ahead of the fleet. We waited for *Sea Horse* to catch up before entering the harbor. *Alpha Rays* was going on a “around-the-lake” tour. Once entering this harbor in South Holland, you were actually on another huge lake. It would have taken us hours to make this trip. Smitty and Johnny were both questioning this ‘tour’. We had already motored the entire trip and wanted to set our feet on land. Wanda and I headed for the South Holland Yacht Club and were beginning to tie-up, when *J-Runner* radioed. Johnny wanted to leave and head for Saugatuck and I did too! I radioed the rest of the fleet to tell them of our intentions to head on to Saugatuck. This didn’t please Wanda—but then again—everyone is not *always* pleased.

J-Runner was out front and on at the horizon about one-fourth of a mile. 190 degrees was our heading. Our trip was about one -and-a-half hours.

Entering this harbor we saw a lot of fishing boats. This made the entrance was turbulent. Saugatuck’s entrance, the Kalamazoo River is narrow. Flanked by steep, tree-covered rises. Trees hide the homes that sit atop these hills. Private docks indicate the location of each home. Further up, the river opens up into a cove.

While going through the channel, we saw *J-Runner* off to the side. We radioed to see why. He had non-threatening problem, a life-line broke. We asked if he need any

assistance—negative. He had a concern for the shallows, so we asked him to follow us.

When we reached the municipal marina, it was full. We lucked-out and found plenty of room at the Coral Gables, our preference for docking. We were hoping the rest of the fleet would show up so we could get everyone in. We'd probably end-up rafting-off.

About two hours later, the rest of the fleet showed up—it was a good thing *we* left South Holland to land these rare spots.

We decide on pizza for dinner.

By 7:45 p.m., *Purple Reigns* is coolin' out. And I am writing this journal.

Wednesday, August 14, 1996

This morning we were going to venture out. We were going to ride our bikes to Douglas, for breakfast. Alpha, Rose, Wanda, Lance, Roger, Diane, and myself, grabbed our backpacks, assemble our bikes and followed Lance. Lance was the only one who knew where we were going. — We headed out on our bikes to enjoy the day. This was about a ten-mile round-trip ride.

We had breakfast, at a small diner, that was located on a corner lot. It was a very quaint place. It looked like 'a grandmother's kitchen'. 'nik-knacks' were all around, and photographs from the past. The owner and her husband came there about ten years prior to get away from the city. So they opened up this little restaurant. They served grits and served juice in 'jelly jars'.

On our way back, we rode over to Tower Marina.

We decided that we'd like to stay here on one of our visits. They had some nice amenities; pool, barbeque pits, nice shower facilities and it was very scenic, too.

We rode over to Tower's used boat yard. We collected boards and boxes to build a platform to climb upon. We boarded several vessels to see what they had to offer. There had to be seven O'Day's of various sizes, including my 'wish' vessel— a 32 foot, center cockpit O'Day with steps up the mast. Lance came out of one of the cabins hollering—he had disturbed a hornets nest.

We found our way back to a small river-front park in Saugatuck. After taking a short bike tour. We would eventually end up at the *Alpha Rays* for a cool drink.

At 2:30 p.m. we played tennis. Al and I had a good match. After that, Al and Elliott's sons played basketball and Al would broadcast his 'unbroken' records at Tugalou College in Mississippi in Nineteen Hundred and-----.

About 5:10 p.m. all activities were over and everyone had returned to the dock.

At 6:00 p.m., talk of storm warnings were coming from boaters sailing in from South Haven. They had started to come in early from the lake, speaking of ten foot waves. A power boater docked behind me was leaving—"Good luck", I told him. All day winds were extremely high, over 20 knots. The water on the Kalamazoo River was very rough. But by 7:00 p.m., the winds died down and the water became calm.

We decided, unanimously, that if the weather was bad, the following day, we would stay in Saugatuck. "What better place to be." Saugatuck is situated inland, up the

Kalamazoo River. Unless you took the mile ride out to the entrance of the harbor, you wouldn't know *what* Lake Michigan was doing.

* * *

We planned to leave for St. Joe in the morning about 6:00 a.m. It had been a beautiful and fun-filled day—only if every day could be like this—maybe in retirement?

Thursday, August 15, 1996

There were bad communications about our departure time. On this trip we didn't clarify, from the very beginning, whether we were going to use Chicago or Michigan time.

At 5:45 a.m., *Alpha Rays* wakes us up. *Aloha, Alpha Rays* and *Aminah* were pulling away from the dock, without *Purple Reigns, J-Runner* and *Sea Horse*. Wanda and I decided to move quickly and alert the others. About half-way the river we caught up to the early departees. Once at the mouth of the entrance, we discovered that *Sea Horse's* impeller is out. *J-Runner* towed Smitty out into the lake. From there Smitty could easily sail to St. Joe. The winds are coming from the northwest.

The sail south was great, northwesterly winds, with following seas. We are all averaging 6 -7 knots, with full jib and main. At times, we were heeling 20 - 25 degrees.

We made it from Saugatuck to St. Joe in record time—6 - 6 1/2 hours.

The entrance of St. Joe was choppy, the winds had picked up. As we were tacking to furl in the jib, a jib sheet got caught on one of the bike handles. I went up to release

the line and off blows my “*Women Sailing Association*” hat. It’s not the first hat lost at sea.

We noticed the Coast Guard Auxiliary outside the St. Joe entrance practicing maneuvers. It was a good day for them to be out practicing. This would turn out to be a good thing.

Earlier, Elliott of *Aminah*, had dropped his family off at South Haven. He would meet us here later. Lynn would drive the motor home here from South Haven.

We were waited 20 minutes for the rotating bridge to open. The Coast Guard was towing Smitty into the harbor. We could see *J-Runner* and *Aloha* were already docked inside. Once we were all docked, Al’s concern was the westerly surge. We might have to move into the marina. About 7:00 p.m., we decided that we were comfortable, on the wall.

St. Joseph/Benton Harbor are two cities divided. St. Joe, being predominantly white and Benton Harbor being predominantly black. (*In fact, Benton Harbor has one of the poorest black populations in American.*)

The area, where we dock is at the foot of a hill, surrounded by trees, mainly weeping willows— a very pretty spot. There aren’t any facilities, but the park offers much—it’s free.

Smitty thanks the Coast Guard for their assistance.

Lynn took those of who wanted to go, to Benton Harbor’s grocery store. We planned to have a picnic under the weeping willows, at ‘the swing’. Before we could proceed, Wanda, ‘the grand booba, most worshipful’, held a

brief meeting about “planning our sail and sailing our plan”. (This was in reference to the confusion of the departure time from Saugatuck and the unplanned ‘tour’ in South Holland.)

Friday, August 16, 1996

This morning at 9:30 a.m., we rode our bikes and some of us skated to Wolf Marine. Smitty is walked. Wolf Marine is a boater’s experience. Each time at Wolf’s is like the first time.

Lance and Elliott worked on *Sea Horse* to repair the impeller. The part needed cost 8 cents.

That afternoon, we decided to have a cookout and then leave for Michigan City. Our concern was arriving at night. But entering from the north, it would be easier. We departed at 6:00 p.m.

We had light northerly winds and somewhat choppy seas which made for a nice cruise. We were maintaining about 5 knots. We all had full jibs and mains and our heading was 210 - 214 degrees. We arrived in Michigan City about 12:30 a.m. and moored at the Michigan City Yacht Club. Great! We had shore power and water. Elliott had a key to the washrooms and toilets.

Saturday, August 17, 1996

We all got up early. We were ready to ride to M & M. We call the place “Red’s” place because an elderly red-haired woman who frequents the place is there every time we go—She was there today!

We're leaving this morning. We readied the boats. Wanda and I fuel-up and pump-out and meet the rest of the fleet coming out of the Michigan City entrance.

The winds are very light from the north. We use full jib and main. The waves are from the northeast and we are managing 5 knots. Our heading is 270 degrees.

At 6:30 p.m., we arrive at Jackson Park and tie up on the wall. *Sea Horse* come in about 20 minutes behind *Purple Reigns* and heads to his slip.

Everyone got busy unloading and packing up their cars—all the while, discussing plans for next years trip! Great trip.

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