

BETWEEN SØREL AND BERTHIERVILLE

Posted on 30 August 2020 by Louis Houde



Categories: [Navigation](#), [The boat](#), [The captain](#)

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On July 12, 2020, life had a surprise in store for me...

Today, the sun rose at five o'clock and it was already 20 ° C. and raining. Around 10 o'clock, the weather is much better, a comfortable 24 ° C, without too many clouds. A light north-westerly wind, sporadic, uncertain. But, gusts are announced for the afternoon, sometimes strong ...

I have no intention of spending too much time on this infamous porthole which has been giving me "a hard time" for two days. I am on my second attempt at reinstalling it. It was leaking badly. More than the others portholes which are still acceptable. It's small, I thought I could get away with it easily. Well no. But it will be fine until tomorrow! For now, the wind is picking up!

Therefore around 11 am, I leave the marina Le Bourg D'eau, in the Berthierville region. Heading: south on the St. Lawrence River. The winds are calm and variable. Sometimes from the south-east, they back to the north-west, pausing at the north. Three or four knots at most. I hoist the mainsail. I want to do some sail trials.

The first hour is going well. Even though the winds are light and variable, they give me the opportunity to practice my gybes, a technique I am not yet fully proficient in. Especially when the winds are light like today. Sometimes I have to do it manually, that is to say by pulling on the mainsheet to shift the boom over??? since the winds are so weak.

The forecasted gusts finally make their appearance. Weak at first, they get stronger and stronger as time goes by. But between them, still no sustained wind. As for me, I stubbornly continue doing the gybes manually.

And then, it's the disaster ...

Repeating the same mistake over and over does not make it a more acceptable mistake.

For several minutes now, I've been heading east and I'm telling myself that maybe it's time to change course and do another gybe, just to practice a little more. The mainsail is on the port side (on the left side when looking forward), completely perpendicular to the boat.

As I get ready to change course (and gybe), I look up at the mast head to check the weather vane showing me the direction of the wind: no change, still running! The breeze is very weak, Caribou is struggling to move forward, I will probably have to do a manual gybe once again.

Unfortunately for me, it does not go as planned. A violent gust hits the Caribou, due north!

And then...

This photo was taken on the morning of July 12, 2020, a few minutes before my departure ...

Mayday Mayday Mayday This is Caribou Caribou Caribou

...

The fall of the mainsail located on the side very exposed to this gust begins to "float" violently. I am surprised at the violence of the wind and I do not have time to realize that the boom has just left its initial position and is towards the stern (the rear part of the boat). At a speed very close to that of light.

In the fraction of a second that will follow and in a pure reflex, I try to catch the hoist of the main sheet of the mainsail (in the photo above, the famous hoist). As I am leaning forward a bit, in order to prevent the boom from smashing my head, my left arm is fully extended. He only has one place to go to continue in the same direction as the boom movement. That is to say backwards ...

It was excruciating pain! I drop on one knee and watch in disbelief as my left arm literally dangles from the bottom of the cockpit. With my right hand, I take hold of my left forearm which I raise to the height of the sternum and I put it back on my knee. My arm is totally paralyzed. I try to move it, nothing happens. For a moment, I feel dizzy ...

Caribou Out of Control ...

Meanwhile, Caribou accelerates and no one is at the helm. Without thinking too much about it, I try to lower (lower) the mainsail which is still well sheeted. The wind blows strongly. As I only have one hand, I grab the halyard located near the entrance to the saloon, I sit on the bench on the port side and I place my two feet on the side of the entrance to the saloon. I pull with all my strength to dislodge it from its cleat, which ends up releasing. But the mainsail refuses to

drop. The wind swells it and the sailboat heels for a moment.

Caribou eventually turns on its own to face the wind, which ultimately causes the mainsail to collapse. The boat stops for a moment, then begins to drift along with the current.

I can hardly open my eyes, I think I'm on the verge of fainting. Colors are so vibrant ...

By instinct more than anything else, I start the engine which fires up on the first try. Thank you, André Renaud, for your excellent tuning work! I take the tiller in my right hand which I pull towards me. I don't really know what to do at this time. I'm trying to find a way to get back to the marina before blacking out. I quickly realize that I have to ask for help.

God bless portable VHF's!

I grab my portable VHF which I keep on my belt. I have to bring myself to call in a Mayday.

Mayday Mayday Maday, this is Caribou, Caribou, Caribou, in front of the Sorel factories, a little towards the entrance to the small channel of Berthierville, white sailboat 30 feet, half lowered sails. I probably have a broken arm.

The Canadian Coast Guard, squadron 1205 from Sorel-Tracy immediately took the call. 10 minutes later, they are on board! They are four young, very professional personnel. I immediately feel taken care of. I breathe a little better.

One of them places a splint to immobilizes my arm. The pain is more intense, but at the same time, I come to myself a little bit. This peaceful and composed young man continues to chat with me calmly, probably to prevent me from blacking out. Thank you, I owe you a debt of gratitude!

Slowly, but surely, we are heading towards the Sorel-Tracy marina, Parc Nautique Regard sur le Fleuve, where an ambulance is waiting to take me to the Sorel-Tracy hospital. I lost track of time a bit. But, I haven't lost the feeling of having been helped by competent and responsive people!

For the first time in my life, at age 54, I felt vulnerable ...

I have always been the one you could count on. Helping people around me, doing a little service here and there, taking care of the weakest, the most vulnerable. Even as a kid, in high school, I was responsible for taking care of an intellectually disabled person. My adult life has taken me to places very few people have gone. I served my country for a few years. I've always enjoyed this role, the one that protects others. And on this July 12, life was going to give it back to me; in a beautiful way.

A very special thank you to **Marjolaine Gauthier, Florence Meunier, Léo Croufer** and **Charles Olivier-Drolet** who were on duty that day and who, through their professionalism, ensure that I will not retain any consequences of this accident. **Thank you, 1000 times thank you!**

I would also like to thank my friend Francis Forest who kindly offered me hospitality the night following my accident. Your smoked turkey sandwich was probably the best sandwich I will ever have in my life!

Thank you also to the Sureté du Québec for bringing Caribou back to its home port. Thank you to the two friendly paramedics who rapidly sent me to the emergency room. Thanks to the beneficiary attendant, I'm not sure of your title, but if you read this, you will recognize yourself! Thank you for helping me!

And thank you also to all those who participated, directly or indirectly, in the smooth running of the entire surgery. I will not name you all, for fear of forgetting some of you!

And to you, who by your personal dedication, thank you my beloved Witch who has made sure my recovery (which is not yet over at the time of this writing ...) went in the best desirable way!

For the record, I got a double humerus fracture, left shoulder and elbow dislocation, left wrist fracture, and many torn/stretched muscles and tendons.

*** UPDATE OF JULY 12 2021

All is well! I have recovered 100%. With the added bonus of a portable barometer. Thank you again to everyone who came to my aid!

The adventure goes on!

And thanks to Maurice for his help in correcting my texts. Without him, you would have a full text of misspellings ;-)

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