

**The Officers, Directors and Members of
US SAILING**

are pleased to present the

ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL

to

JOHN

FOR THE RESCUE AS FOLLOWS:

OWNERS WORDS:

I have sailed all my life in San Francisco Bay, as well as around this North America continent, in boats from El Toros to the most elite of hybrid ocean racers, in some of the biggest regattas. Having logged thousands of ocean miles in tanker ships, I have seen much of what the seas can dish out. I remember many times being on the deck of the tanker, where it was a dangerous and threatening place to be in foul conditions caused by both wind and sea, saying to myself, "I'm sure glad I'm on a 700 foot ship and not some little, bouncy cork 40 or 50 foot sailboat out in these conditions. I think I'll leave this ocean stuff to someone else and enjoy the buoy sailing in the relatively pleasant and protected waters I am so accustomed to."

This has always satisfied me with a few exceptions that stem from my family heritage. First, growing up on San Francisco Bay, in many circles you are just no one unless you've done some of the local ocean races that are so demandingly different and have such diversified challenges compared to other areas.

Second, my father, as a young man in the 1920's, had sailed a Star boat around the lightship. My grandfather, in the 1850's, had sailed hi gaff-rig schooner many times around the Farallones. Because of this, I felt deep down I was not living up to the family standards.

A few years ago my wife, Karin, and I were blessed with the acquisition of a Moore 24, a boat known for its rugged durability and strength in the worst of conditions as well as being one of the most competitive Farallones Race boats that exists.

I thought long and hard about entering the Double-handed Farallones Race. Then I decided that if my life-long companion and sailing partner, John Skinner, would do it with me, I'd give it a try. John and I go back a long way. We know each other's capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, and our trust for each other has been proven more than once.

After much thought, probably stemming from many of the same concerns as my own, John agreed to go on the race. It would be a test for both of us, however, at that time neither of us knew how much. The one thing we did do was jokingly agreed that neither of us would go overboard, because at our age and with a short-handed crew, it would probably mean The End. In retrospect, I think we were both "in denial" that something like this would ever happen to a couple of tried and true experienced sailors like ourselves.

With a mediocre start, we headed out the Gate in light winds. John's competitive drive was definitely fired up that day. Together we sailed hard and worked the boat fairly well. When "The Squall" hit us a few miles from the Farallones. I was surprised that we were sailing the boat pretty well and making good headway while all the boats around us seemed to be bald-headed and flogging their mains just to survive the conditions.

Upon rounding the Farallon Islands, the squall had passed. However, it was still fairly windy for a close spinnaker reach with hopes of laying the Golden Gate Bridge and that seemed like a long shot at best.

John was driving the boat. He is a gifted helmsman under adverse conditions with the spinnaker up, very aggressive and always in control of the boat even in a round up. The seas were huge and the wind was blowing hard. Our situation was that we would sail aggressively 5 to 10 minutes, round up, and then regain control. We were both accepting this procedure as necessary and were getting comfortable with it. I had the spinnaker sheet and was sitting forward of John, looking ahead with intensity during the round-ups so I could trim at the precise moment.

During one round up while I was looking forward, I heard a frightening and foreign noise behind me. It was that of a tremendous Chug-a-lug splash sound. Without looking back, I was stunned with fear and my stomach had the worst sinking feeling. My eyes froze in the forward position for about a second or two. I knew in my mind that my greatest fears had now come true and I didn't want to recognize them. Those one or two seconds seemed like an eternity while my entire life of sailing with John flashed through my mind.

As I finally turned around, John was nowhere to be seen. The safety harness tether he was wearing led over the side and under the water. Finally his head popped to the surface and his body, still attached to the boat, was banging against the side of the hull by the transom. Thank God the tether held and he was not gone forever. The waves were so enormous I know that if he became separated from the boat and over even one crest, I never would have found him.

I threw away the spinnaker sheet and let the mainsail out to a full luff. Then I went back to the transom and tried to pull John back onto the boat up the transom while he kicked to no avail. Nothing budged him an inch. We both knew this was hopeless and we must try something else. At this point I was in a mild state of panic as I knew the odds were against John getting back on the boat. He's not the epitome of a physically fit person and the stress of his job has strapped more than a few pounds on him over the years. The one thing I did know was that if I didn't want to lose my best friend, I must overcome any panic and remain cool and collected for both our sakes.

John, realizing that boarding via the transom was useless, now moved himself forward. He said he was being dragged by the forward motion of the boat and told me to take the spinnaker down. I did. I considered just letting it fly away but chose the conservative route of dousing it inside the boat, as had I thrown the internal lines away, any snag or hang-up may have compounded our problems. As I gathered the spinnaker cloth and stuffed it down the main hatch, I felt as if my stomach had been removed surgically. My dousing the spinnaker was good, as while I was doing it I had a few seconds to assess the situation and try to prioritize what remaining ways might work to get John back on board. Should I drop the mainsail as well and try to hand the boom with the main halyard as a boom topping lift, allowing me to then detach the mainsheet from the traveler and hook it to John's harness to hoist him up? No, I thought, that would be a last resort. It would take too much time and too many minutes had already ticked off. Also, at that point, the boom and sail would have come down on John and worsened an already bad situation.

John, while treading water, was thinking also. He directed me to put a loop in the end of a line so he could use it as a step. I did; he got his foot in it but couldn't step up or stand in it while I winched the line up.

Now I knew we were desperate. John was really cold and had been in the water a long time, maybe 15 minutes, maybe 20. I was thinking that John's death was imminent. I wondered how I would ever tell his wife, Rina, and his two kids that I had lost their husband and father. My mind then tried to decide if I should give him a burial at sea or try to tow his body back. The situation was grim, and getting morbid.

I then took the spare jib halyard and clipped it to his harness in hopes I could winch him high enough. Sound simple? Not so simple. In a boat this light and small I would not have been surprised if the halyard pulled the mast down to the water, capsizing us. Also, the halyard was now led from the front of the mast, around the shrouds to behind the mast, inducing tremendous friction. Why didn't I move John to forward of the mast? He was tired and weak now, the freeboard was higher in the front, and I just didn't want to expend any more time. I prayed that this would work.

As I winched on the halyard the first 8 or 10 inches came easy. I could see relief on John's face as he no longer had to fight so hard to keep his mouth out of the water. But then the winching got real hard, real fast. I figured the halyard, being led around the mast, had jumped out of its sheave. I winched more and got a little more. I gave it everything I had.

John and the deck level were now closer than ever. I went to the leeward side to give one last effort at pulling him aboard. This tipped the boat, lowering the deck a few more inches toward John. With this, John gave a burst of strength as I pulled. John rolled himself onto the deck.

After resting a few minutes, John went below to change. I headed the boat back to the Bay under main alone and had a quiet prayer meeting with my Higher Power, offering thanks.

About a half-hour later, with warmer and somewhat drier clothes (it was soaked down below), John returned to the cockpit and said exactly what I knew he would: "John, let's get back in this race. Which spinnaker should I set?" He was, no pun intended, dead serious.

I informed him we wouldn't set. When I doused the chute I unhooked the halyard so it would be in our way and just let it go. It was now up the mast.

We finished the race under main and jib knowing that we had won something more than a boat race. This day I credit John for keeping his cool (again, no pun intended) and helping me through this experience by directing me from the water. I credit him for saving my life as well as his own, for had we not finished that race together it would have tormented me always. I hope John will sail with me next year.

P.S. We still finished in the top half of the fleet, and didn't break anything. Even the jib halyard had not jumped its sheave.

CREW'S WORDS:

I've sailed for well over thirty years. I am an avid sailor. I have raced everything from El Toros to keelboats. Despite this, I have not sailed often in the ocean. Twenty years ago, I sailed on a 27 ft. boat from San Francisco to San Diego, but I have not sailed much in the ocean since then. I think the reason is a combination of lack of opportunity and respect. I have not had a lot of offers to sail in the ocean, but it is also true that I have declined a few offers, considering the situations undesirable.

In addition, I have not sailed in any of the short-handed sailing events. I often sail my boat back from crewed races single-handed, but I have never entered a short-handed event. So, when my good friend John Selbach suggested that we enter the double-handed Farallones race, I thought about it for some time.

On the one hand, the Moore 24 is the perfect boat for the Farallones race. Also, it would be fun to do with John. He's a good sailor and good company. On the other hand there's, well, 25 miles of ocean out and back. Since I have only seen the Farallones once, twenty years ago in the middle of the night, I agreed to do the race. John had his own ambivalence about the race, but once we decided to do it, all systems were go! I remember joking that we better not even think about falling overboard, because it would mean certain death.

The trip out was relatively uneventful. We started in zero wind conditions. Got a poor start, but so what, it's a long race. Once on the racecourse, my competitive juices began to flow and I began thinking about doing well, instead of just finishing. Outside the gate, the waves got huge. The wind also picked up and we switched to the smaller jib. The worst part of the trip out was watching the Farallon Islands for over two hours. They never seemed to get any closer! A squall hit about a half-hour before the Islands, combined with a large clockwise shift. We reefed and began reaching down to the islands, we had overstood! We rounded the Islands with Wet Spot, War and Olsen 25.

We set the chute once we were around the islands. We had to hold 60 degrees to make the gate. I had calculated the night before, that a 10-degree deviance from the course would result in being 4 miles south of the gate. Thus it was important to hold course. Given the wind direction and the size of the waves, holding 60 degrees proved to be difficult. We began a process of surfing, having dropped way below 60 degrees, and trying to recover course and the broaching.

We broached about 10 times. Enough so that it was becoming routine. The waves were large enough that they would just take over control of the boat. There was nothing we could do once it started to broach. Our only concern at this point was which was faster, keep the chute up or drop it to hold course? Obviously, it would be fastest to keep the chute up, hold course and NOT broach! I have broached hundreds of times over the years. I have also slipped from my position a few times during broaches, who hasn't? Thus I was not concerned during the last broach. Nor was I concerned as I slipped from the high side.

I don't remember when I realized this slip was no longer routine. I do remember the course of events in a very slow-motion surreal manner. I fell over backwards. I went completely under water and struggled to come back to the surface. By the time I reached the surface, I was astern of the boat. Thank God I was harnessed in. I was also wearing my float coat. I pulled back to the stern of the boat and grabbed the backstay. No problem. Only task left was to jump back aboard the boat.

Slight problem. To begin with, over the years my body weight has increased faster than my strength. In addition, the cold water had zapped any strength I might have had anyway, I couldn't pull myself up! It was all I could do to hold on to the boat! Perhaps things would be better by the shrouds. As I worked my way along the boat, John dropped the chute.

I remember thinking very clearly, "I am not going to die today. I have a family, they need me, and besides I'm just in the water, tethered to the boat. The only problem is I can't get aboard. And if I can't get back aboard I will surely die!" I tried kicking my foot up on the deck and rolling over. I could touch the deck, but I couldn't lift at all. Then I slipped and went back under the water. John tried passing a line to me with a bowline on one end and the other end wrapped around the winch. As he winched the line up, my leg lifted, but the rest of my body would not follow. This was ridiculous, all I needed to do was stand up, but I couldn't. Finally, John passed me the spare jib halyard, which we attached to my harness.

He was able to winch me up part way but it wouldn't go further. Finally, he gave one more try and I was back aboard. John had saved my life.

I immediately went below to change into dry clothes. I was no longer interested in the race. We didn't reset the chute. We eventually finished with just 90% of the jib up.

A few lessons. My being harnessed in and having a life jacket on were things we did right. The first thing we did wrong was to try to sail beyond ourselves. We're no longer kids. We were fatigued from the long trip out to the islands. We should not have had the chute up in the first place. We might have even been more competitive if we had set the 150% and held a higher course. Also, I was using a six-foot tether. If I had been hooked in with a 3-foot tether, I wouldn't have gone overboard. Finally, we should have had a plan for getting back aboard. A boarding ladder of some sort would have been very useful (try it out first to make sure it works). A fixed boarding ladder would be even more important for single-handing. If I had been single handing, I would not have been able to get back aboard at all.

I might go back out in the ocean again. I'm beginning to talk about the double-handed Farallones for next year. But for now, I think I'll stay in the bay.

The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal was awarded to John