

The Officers, Directors and Members of

US SAILING

are pleased to present the

ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL

to

SANDY DUMAS

FOR THE RESCUE AS FOLLOWS:

While preparing for a sail change from a #3 to a #4 jib, just before the start of a race, Sandy's husband Dave was hit by the boom during an accidental jibe and knocked backwards over the lifelines. His foot was caught on something and Dave was hanging from the boat, upside down, head in the 72 degree water of summertime Lake Erie. He was unable to catch the boat as it continued downwind at 7+kts under reefed main only. Sandy threw the ORC horseshoe at Dave, but it landed perhaps 50' away. Dave swam to the horseshoe with great difficulty and managed to reach it only because of the drogue attached to the device. Meanwhile, Sandy turned the boat around and headed back to her husband, reaching too fast for a pick-up. She sailed to windward to avoid hitting Dave, now safely in the horseshoe, and then went to leeward to lower the sail. She started the engine and motored up to Dave, who grabbed a sheet line and pulled himself up to the rail, then to a lifeline, over it and into the cockpit. Sandy's quick deployment of the horseshoe clearly saved Dave's life, as he was not wearing flotation at the time of his entry into the water; and her turnabout of the boat kept him in sight all the time.

John B. Bonds
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee
By Direction

**The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Award was awarded to Sandy Dumas
on November 2, 1996 at the Ford Yacht Club, Grosse Ile, Michigan.**

DETAILS

THE VICTIMS WORDS:

The Sail Club hosted their annual "Jack and Jill Race" typically done with husband and wife teams. It's a reverse start, small boats go off first and others follow on their handicap times so the finish is boat-for-boat. Usually it is a fun event. When we got to the start area just afternoon, it was blowing 18-20 from the northwest with some gusts at 20+ and some rain. This makes it an offshore breeze so the waves were only about 1 to 1.5 feet at the start area. Both of us were in full foul weather gear, boots and all. Given these conditions there were only a few of us out there, but this is not anything we have not dealt with before.

Just for some background, my wife Sandy Dumas and I have been cruising and racing the Great Lakes for some 20 years and have been hit with all kinds of weather, especially in Lake Huron which is deep and cold. We presently sail a Ranger 33.

We put the main up with one reef going out to the start line, and I had the #3 jib on deck. After a few minutes at the starting area I decided to get the #4 jib up, a 110%. I went below to pull this sail out and was walking forward along the port rail, on port jibe, when the main jibed over onto starboard without warning. The boom hit me in the shoulder and chest. Luckily it was about at the end of its travel and didn't hit me with full force. Over the lifeline backwards I went. My foot was caught on something (still can't determine what) and I was trapped by one leg over the lifeline, hanging outside the boat upside down, head in the water. I attempted to jerk up far enough to grab the rail, but my foot came loose at that time and I was free of the boat. I grabbed at the boat as it went sailing past downwind at about 7+ knots with the reefed main only. I didn't make it.

Sandy saw the situation and immediately turned to the horseshoe float in its bracket on the stern rail and tossed it in my direction. The float hit the water some number of yards downwind from me. It's difficult for me to judge this distance, but I say not much further than the length of the pool at the YMCA, maybe less. Problem of course was that the wind and waves were moving the float away from me at some speed. I started swimming for it as soon as I saw it hit the water. This was the critical moment – I was swimming with full foul weather gear and boots and didn't seem to be making progress towards the horseshoe. I hesitated a moment, thinking I needed to strip and then swim to it. In that moment, the horseshoe moved farther away and I realized stopping was not the thing to do. Also at this time the pain in my calf, which had been trapped on the lifeline, became evident. I do recall a thought flashing through my mind that this would have to wait, and started kicking harder than before, now realizing my only hope was to get to that horseshoe. There was a drogue attached to the horseshoe, otherwise it would have been long gone.

Two things were happening simultaneous to the above: Sandy had turned the boat around and the anchored Race Committee, a Pearson 30 over 100 yards off saw me in the water.

Although Sandy can pilot the boat as good as most people at our Club, we had never practiced a MOB drill or how to stop the boat under these conditions. She came reaching to me, realized it was too fast and had to head up and past out of the way to windward to prevent running me down. She went to leeward to drop the main and motored back to windward. The Committee boat was struggling at this time to raise anchor. The Race Committee and I discussed this later and agreed they should have slipped the anchor line and responded to the emergency. We all do the things ingrained in the consciousness, who ever just drops the anchor line and leaves? Well, ask the person in the water if the expense of the anchor and rode is a factor. Even finding a float such as a cushion and attaching it to the rode is faster than raising anchor.

By now I had reached the horseshoe and now its just mechanics of Sandy motoring up to me and getting on the boat. As she motored up, I grabbed a sheet line and pulled myself up to the rail, the lifeline then rolled me over the combing into the cockpit.

What is the most obvious problem here? I DIDN'T HAVE ON MY FLOTATION DEVICE. You will find this hard to believe, but there are two Crewsaver inflatables in the hanging locker, which I had to push aside to get my foul weather gear. Lesson learned? You bet!

Have a drogue attached to any throwable flotation device. Any wind/waves more than dead calm will blow it beyond reach quickly.

Practice MOB drill. The quick stop could have gone a long way to reducing the time it took to get back to the MOB.

Luck was with me. I didn't get injured such that I couldn't swim or pull myself out of the water. I was conscious even though I had sucked in some water in the initial immersion. Lake Erie was about 72F degrees at the time, so I did not get chilled.

End of story. Safe and sound now, and hopefully, a little smarter.

Dave Dumas