

Stuck in the Mud with Dad

by Sheridan Monroe

■ On an Easter sailing adventure with her dad in 2013, the (now) 14-year-old author reaching up the Potomac.



Last Easter, I had just turned 13 and I was ready for adventure. My dad and I agreed it would be fun to team up to move our boat from Solomons to a boatyard in Herring Creek for some repairs on the way to its ultimate destination in Washington. The catch is that our 30-foot sailboat does not have a normal engine. When the original engine died a couple of seasons ago, my father replaced it with an electric motor that works well as long as there is still electricity in the batteries. When asked how long the electricity will last or how far the boat can go on a charge,

my dad is not concrete about the answers. I actually don't think he knows. My mom and brother figured this out and found excuses to not join us on the trip.

The plan was to spend Friday night on the boat in the marina and get underway just before dawn on Saturday. We would then sail out of the Patuxent River, down the Chesapeake Bay, up part of the lower Potomac River, and finish near the headwaters of Herring Creek, in rural southern Maryland. My dad said the trip was around 40 miles. He left driving directions for Mom to pick us up at the small

off-the-beaten-path boatyard. We thought we would arrive home at a reasonable hour on Saturday night and enjoy a lazy Easter Sunday at home together. What could possibly go wrong?

Our Saturday trip began with us oversleeping a little. We did see a beautiful sunrise as we departed Solomons. The wind was light, but at least there was some wind, so Dad turned off the engine. I did most of the sailing out of the Patuxent River, and Dad adjusted the sails. He says he enjoys "light air sailing," but when we got into the Chesapeake Bay, the wind disappeared entirely. After some grumbling about the forecast not matching the conditions we were seeing, my father gave in and started to use a mix of the motor, the sails, or both. With so little wind, I lost interest at this point and went below to watch DVD on my computer.

Several hours later, we were at the mouth of the Potomac River. The predicted winds finally showed up. We were behind schedule, but when we turned up the Potomac River, even more wind filled in behind us, and it felt as if we were flying up the river. I enjoyed my turn steering again. The sun was setting as we dropped the sails just outside the entrance to Herring Creek. It was a beautiful scene, and it seemed like everything was going as planned.

Turning into the channel that leads into the creek, there was a surprising amount of current flowing against us. It was clear the tide was going out, and the creek was longer than we thought. We realized this trip would finish in the dark. At this point, Mom called us on the cell phone to explain she was hopelessly lost on the two-lane roads of southern Maryland. I suggested that we just anchor for the night, and send Mom home for now. We could finish sailing on Easter morning. Unfortunately, my dad seemed intent on finishing.

My job was to use a hand-held floodlight plugged into the boat to scan for markers and hazards. We arrived at a place where my dad could just make out the docks of the small boatyard. My light picked up white reflective tape on a piling between us and the boatyard. We could not see if there was a red or green shape associated with it, and the chart just indicated it was a private marker. Dad assumed it was a shoal. We went to the right of the marker. Suddenly we stopped moving. Dad tried unsuccessfully to reverse back into deeper water. Dad then tried to toss the anchor and chain as far he could in the direction of deeper water and pull the boat out of the mud. It didn't work.

At this point, Dad said I got my wish, and we would see Easter sunrise from the boat out in the creek. Since we were stuck in soft mud with the tide going out, Dad called Mom and told her to drive back home. We would try again in the morning.

I was happy because I just wanted to curl up in the V-berth and go to sleep. Dad slept in the main cabin so he could monitor conditions. At some point in the

early morning hours, the combination of wind and the rising tide popped us out of the mud like a cork. By sunrise, we were backed into a slip at the boatyard with everything organized and put away. Mom found better directions and came to pick us up. Although that Easter sailing trip did not turn out how we planned, it is one that I will always remember.



About the Author: Fourteen-year-old Sheridan Monroe will attend high school in Washington, DC, in the fall. She enjoys sailing and other outdoor adventures. She wrote this article in honor of Father's Day, June 15.