

Neptune teaches humility to a very slow learner

A lesson that we have learned on several occasions regards humility. Just when we think we have mastered a new skill and begin to feel confident about it and perhaps start bragging...just a little, Neptune has a way of making us regret our hubris.

A case in point occurred during our passage south this past fall. We were transiting from Mystic, CT to Annapolis through New York City via Hell Gate. As the timing was wrong for the currents through Hell Gate, we decided to pick up a mooring off the Harlem Yacht Club to spend the night. I made the mistake of mentioning that we were getting pretty good at picking up moorings after all our practice the past summer in Maine.

The mooring to which we were directed was tightly surrounded by other boats and the wind was blowing about 18-20 knots. There was also a current. These should not, however, be problems for a couple of nautical aces like us. David wended his way through the boats, approached the mooring pennant into the wind and slowed to a semi-stop. Dressed in a lovely new white sweatshirt, I picked up the pennant, just as I had countless times this past summer. Unfortunately, this time the loop in the mooring line was buried somewhere under three inches of green slime. After flinging a couple handfuls of the slime off the mooring line with the appropriate facial expressions, expletives and body English, I wasn't able to locate the loop under all the goop before the wind blew us away from the mooring. We motored around for our second approach, and this time I donned a pair of work gloves.

Not much better luck on the second, third or fourth passes, but I was making definite progress. David could tell by the amount of green slime on my white sweatshirt, on my face and in my hair that I was determined. There couldn't be that much more slime left on the mooring line. This time should do it. On the fifth pass, I lost my favorite hat overboard.

By now people on nearby boats were beginning to come topside to watch the entertainment. The marina launch had passed by twice now, and I had the feeling we that we would become a point of interest for the harbor tour boat before long. Our boat has our hailing port of Denver displayed proudly on her stern. A salt on a nearby boat shouted "Hey, you Colorado sailors really knew your stuff!" (Expletives deleted!)

On the sixth through eighth attempts, David came forward to assist. Some definite progress now. Both of us as well as the forward decks, bow pulpit and jib sheets were coated in green slime, but we had just about cleared the loop enough to get a line through it.

As we were motoring around for our ninth attempt, the marina launch radioed and asked whether we would like some assistance. At this point, we weren't about to let them share in the fun. David responded that we would make about ten more attempts. If we hadn't gotten it by then, we would gladly accept his assistance. By now the wheel, VHF and cockpit were also slimed.

On the ninth attempt, we had success of sorts. We managed to get a line through the mooring loop, but by the time we accomplished this feat, we had drifted out of reach of the forward cleat. David hurried back to the midship cleat and managed to tie it off there. Now we were broadside to the wind, tied by our midship cleat to the mooring line. After briefly wondering whether anyone would notice, we decided we'd best get the mooring line properly secured to the forward cleat. The mooring loop itself was out of reach so David couldn't put a line through it, but by tying another line to the cleated line and winching it in, we were at last able to secure a line from the forward cleat to the mooring line. Another ten minutes, and we were finally moored. We gracefully accepted the applause from our audience, took our bows and began de-sliming.

The marina launch tactfully waited until we were shipshape and somewhat cleaned up before coming by to collect the mooring fee. David chided him that he ought to give us the night for free in exchange for all the entertainment we had provided. At least we got a chuckle out of him as he charged us the full fee.

So now, whenever one of us starts a sentence with "You know, we're starting to get pretty good at ...", the other is quick to add that it is only because of the favors shown us by Neptune and the lessons taught. We have been fortunate in the past and we are ever so humbly grateful for his continued assistance.