

THE PULSE OF SPIRIT



EMISSARIES
OF DIVINE LIGHT

THROUGH THE STORM

26 JULY 2010

Recently, I had the opportunity to go with my wife, Joyce, for a two-week sailing trip. We sailed from Point Judith, Rhode Island, into Long Island Sound; out through the East River and past the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor; and then down the New Jersey coast into Delaware Bay. It was a glorious trip. We saw dolphins off the coast of New Jersey!

The whole voyage was a learning experience, but the critical point was a storm we encountered. It was Wednesday, June 23rd, off the coast of Bridgeport, Connecticut. We found out later that a tornado touched down in Bridgeport, and there were gusts of wind in the area that were seventy-eight miles an hour. A state of emergency had been declared.

We were several miles offshore with our daughter, Helena, and her fiancé, Victor. For the most part it was a clear and wonderful day, a beautiful day. We watched the dark gray thunderhead cross Long Island Sound and approach Connecticut. We thought we were smart enough to know what direction this menacing-looking storm was moving, and we thought it would pass us by. In fact, we had just put on additional sail, and we were kicking back and relaxing. That's when the storm hit us.

I heard a weather person describe it later as a microburst, in which the wind begins by moving vertically instead of horizontally. When it hits the ground or the water, it spreads out in all directions.

I've sailed for a good part of my life, and I've seen some bad weather; I've been in some large storms in some small boats. I've *never* seen something like this! The wind whistled through the metal stays holding our mast, ripped off part of our wind indicator and tore up

one of our sails. It was hailing, and I don't know just how hard the winds were blowing, but they were blowing hard. We let out our sails, but even with our sails most of the way out, we were heeling. We were broadside to the wind, which is not how you want to be in a storm like that—you want to be either headed up into the wind or away from it, and into the waves or away from them. We had one wave come over the side and into the cockpit. Helena turned to me and said, "So what are we going to do?" In all honesty, I said, "I don't know."

She also suggested we turn on the engine, which turned out to be a good idea. It helped us head the boat up into the wind and into the waves. At the same time, I exhorted my crew to let out the sails to make sure that they were catching as little wind as possible—they were flapping in the wind. And soon we were able to furl them in.

It was fortunate that the storm lasted for only about twenty minutes. The waves in Long Island Sound didn't have a chance to build to the level I have sometimes seen them. The seas calmed, the sun came out, and it was all over. We were drenched, but it was a warm day, so that wasn't the worst thing in the world.

My crew and I were sorely tested. If you've been in experiences like that, where you know there are lives at risk, you hit a different kind of reality, a no-nonsense reality. When the storm hit, I exhorted my crew to let out the lines on the sails. I said, "Let out the sheet," and when I saw that our boat was still heeling on its side, I raised my voice and I spoke above the storm, "*Let out the sheet!*" There were things that had to happen to preserve the well-being of my crew and me and my boat. They had to be the right things and they had to be done—not partway done but all the way done.

So those are no-nonsense moments when, if people are rising to the occasion, they are letting go of anything that would get in the way of seeing what really needs to happen. What you do has to be the right thing, it has to be the intelligent thing. And all of the usual thoughts and feelings that may keep us from taking action when action needs to be taken have to be out of the way. It is not a time for procrastinating. It's not a time for being overwhelmed, although it would be easy to feel overwhelmed in that kind of situation. It is a time for being present and being clear. It's not a time for objecting, for wishing that this thing hadn't happened, whatever it is. The storm could have been a time of recrimination for me. I knew that bad weather was a possibility—but not like this. They had said that there was a possibility of thunderstorms, but I wasn't thinking of *this* kind of thunderstorm. I could have been lost in self-recrimination, but it wasn't a time for that.

So we pulled through, with a little damage to the boat. Over the rest of our voyage, there were other things that came up—none quite so threatening, apparently, but daily events when, as is often true on a sailboat, steps need to be taken. There are a whole host of bad possible outcomes if you don't do what needs to be done. I suppose that's one of the

reasons I like sailing, because it calls a person to action, it calls a person to awareness; it calls to being present and seeing what's happening, and then doing something about it.

By the time we got to the place where we dry-docked our boat in Delaware Bay, I felt energized. I felt myself alive in a way I hadn't felt in a long time. I think we felt that together. Our boat, this little thirty-foot world, was encompassed, surrounded by our spirit of care. There was life aboard that boat, and just about every part of our little craft had received some attention from us. Most importantly, life was preserved, and it was thriving through us and our loved ones.

I came home to find that it is wonderful not only to go on a trip, and visit strange and new places, but it is wonderful to come home. You can see where you come from in the light of what you've experienced. What I noticed was how many things there are in my world that need attention but which just sit there. There are issues that I just don't address. It seemed to me that, as human beings, we've come to live a life where we just tolerate things that don't work, that in fact threaten life in some way, that threaten our well-being, that threaten the joy and fulfillment of our life and those around us. There are all the insidious little habits that creep in, all the sense of overwhelm that makes a person say, "What could I do? I'm just one person; it will always be there tomorrow," and so on and so forth. There is nothing like a storm to galvanize a person into action.

They say that if you take a frog and put it in boiling water, it will jump out immediately. But if you put it in lukewarm water and gradually raise the temperature, there is no point at which the frog realizes that it needs to get out of that pot. I think human life goes something like that.

So what stops you from doing the thing that you need to do? From saying what you need to say to the people around you, so that they can hear you? So they can hear your vision and they can feel the imperative of life that you are feeling and the imperative of action; perhaps so that they can feel your blessing and your love? What would compel you to embrace a new attitude, if you hold judgments of other people or yourself? What would stir you to say, "That's enough!—it is killing me to think all these thoughts, believing this about myself or about another person, or having this attitude"?

And what stops us when we feel the compulsion to do what we know we are deeply called to do, but sit on it? When we put it off, put it off, and put it off, finding reasons not to act out of the heartbeat of spirit that's moving inside.

There are things that we can do to raise the level of life that we are experiencing. But somehow people forget that. They think it always has to be *this* way. But it could be different—we could take an action that would make it different for us and for the people around us. We could increase the level of vibrancy and joy.

How much joy and fulfillment can you stand to have in your life? How about raising our capacity to endure joy, to endure life and fulfillment? I'm not talking about a sugar-sweet happy experience. I'm talking about real joy, real life, real fulfillment. Can we tolerate that?

All too many people have the belief that they have to trudge through life the way they have been. Maybe we could take the lid off and, in a very real way, experience something different, experience something more, share more with our friends, and blow by some of those ceilings that have been operative in our life. We prove to ourselves that it *is* possible when we do it. We don't have to go looking for a storm; but if one arises, perhaps it is an opportunity for our victory.

You may know the story of how they train elephants in the East. They put a post in the ground and they chain the baby elephant to the post. The baby elephant tries to move, and it can't. Years go by, and the elephant grows up. It becomes a huge, lumbering beast, and still allows itself to be tied to that same post in the ground, believing that it doesn't have the strength and the power to pull it up, to uproot it and do something different.

The larger part of who we are knows that there are limitations that are unnatural to us as a human being. The larger part of us knows that we can take the actions in our life now that preserve life, that bring the deepest joy and fulfillment. We can face the storms that may arise and meet them with courage and victory.

Here is a poem of mine that shares this experience:

Through Foundering Seas

*I sail my boat
through the foundering seas
past Plum Island
and before the safe harbor
that lies to the east.
It is the kind of drunken chop
my mother sailed through
years before
when the wind turned
against the gulf stream,
and my father lay out cold,
racked with an unknown pain
beneath the deck;
when she sang
against the terrible night
to bring her boat safely*

to the Florida shore.

*But this is a different storm
on a different day,
and I have not been
at the helm
through such a swallowing sea
with an open craft,
taking on water like this
over the sides.*

*And never before,
in such a sea
where there is no comforting
roll of the waves that come,
one following another,
but only rising gray swells
that peak at will around us
with the wicked west wind
whipping off their tops
to throw them in our face;
never before have I carried
my dear only daughter
into such a storm;
her, smiling beside me
as she licks the salt spray off her lips,
unaware of the gray behemoth
lurking in the deep,
ready to swallow us
into its great belly.*

*O, if I had not departed
from the now distant shore
on this fateful day!
But I set sail
on a golden morn,
and I made a pact
with the sun as he rose
to greet what the sea would bring us.*

*So I will sing
my mother's song of hope,
and through those tones,*

*will the wind
to carry
this vessel,
this child,
this day,
to safety.*

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