

IN MEMORIAM: KATIE THOMPSON, 1942 – 2005

From her school days to the end of her life, Katie loved to sail. No two ways about it, she loved everything to do with sailing. She was a stalwart on our annual cruises for 7 years: Newport, Greece, French Riviera, Grenadines, Tahiti, Belize, and Tonga, bringing her daughter Cammie twice and her son Chris once.

Her spirit was indomitable, but her body let her down. Breast cancer came in 1992, then remission until 2002, then a gradual relapse as the cancer spread, leading to her peaceful death in 2005.

Even as the cancer spread, she sailed with us in 2003 (Belize) and 2004 (Tonga), saying nothing about her health and lifting spirits with her playfulness, thoughtfulness, wisdom, humor, and style.

Always, style.

While sailing west from Mykonos to Athens in 1999, the cockpit crew engaged in an extended discussion about the optimum drill in case of man overboard. The debate droned on. Throw the horseshoe overboard, of course, but how to get back to the crew in the water? Williamson turn? Racetrack turn? Back down? Bear off and jibe? Katie, eager to put theory to test and have some fun in the bargain, stepped off the transom into the water without a word, without a life preserver (or an aft lookout, for that matter). History does not record the details of the ensuing maneuver, but the "man" overboard was rescued, with a grin on her face.

Earlier that cruise, we were beating north to Mykonos, fighting a 30-knot Meltemi and head seas, shipping green water and heavy spray in the cockpit, with much of the crew turning as green as the water. Sailors know not to trifle with any wind that has a name, but we were determined and thrashed on, though the helmsman was having difficulty seeing through the spray. Katie, up to the task, donned a face mask and snorkel and took the helm. Drenched with spray, hair flying, she braved the storm and provided a photo op at the same time. If one can grin with a snorkel in her mouth, she was doing it.



Her sea bag was always a cornucopia of odds and ends for having fun on a cruise: a parrot mascot (beanie baby), games (notably Taboo, with a plastic buzzer which would sound off at awkward times and places, like airport security), angel cards (don't ask), a cheesy "kerosene" lamp and cheesier Xmas lights (for the table centerpiece), paper umbrellas (for the odd Mai Tai), fake tattoos, a book of knots and splices (for fancywork), iridescent duct tape, stick-on stars (to create the glow-in-the-dark Southern Cross on her cabin overhead), glow sticks (for whatever), fireworks and sparklers (for the occasional national holiday), and even, if there was room left over, some clothes. We called her sea bag Pandora's box.

She was a practical joker. And she was first mate, Mother Superior, cheerleader, den mother, sailing buddy, camp counselor, activities director, tattoo artist, fireworks artisan, chief cook and bottle washer. She was the heart and soul of the crew.

In her final hours, when care givers were having difficulty helping her to her feet and steadying her, she protested, in the weakest of voices: "I just have to get my sea legs ... I'm a sailor, you know."

Indeed.

Her spirit will sail with us wherever we sail. So will the parrot.

We wish you fair winds and following seas, dear friend. Rest in peace.

