

As Gwendoline is the only Shrimper known to have been stolen, I thought it would be fitting to write up events from her log as memoirs. We bought her new in July '92 and Bryn thought it would be a good idea to take her to Falmouth Week, completely forgetting he couldn't have the time off work! This meant living on board with a 3 and 8 year old and with little or no boating experience. Fortunately, friends on a bigger boat kindly escorted me around, and helped me pick up moorings. '92 was the year when a gale on the Tuesday night caused racing to be cancelled next day. The wind was against tide and we swung round and round on our mooring at Freshwater in the Percuil River. The fishing boat next to us was doing the same thing in the opposite direction, and I was sure we were going to hit it. The following morning we were very grateful when our friend Richard appeared in his wooden dinghy and managed to get us ashore one by one. That night we managed to squelch our way into the Rising Sun for the night - never has comfort tasted so good to all three of us!

Going through the race

The next year, while still inexperienced, we were nevertheless sailing the boat from London to Falmouth in stages over the summer. We left Poole, to sail to Lulworth Cove, planing to do an overnight passage round Portland Bill to Lyme Regis, sailing outside the race. Things did not get off to a good start, when Bryn decided not to wait for the bridge to open in Poole. He lowered the mast, squashing the compass and popping it out of its socket; grabbing it on its way overboard, and replacing it. The wind was a brisk westerly and our

timing was right to catch the slack water round Peveril Point and St Alban's Head. The compass popped out of its socket again, and this time we lost it. Realising that we could not attempt a night passage without a compass, we went into Swanage. The chandlers said the St Alban's Head race was bad, and the best plan was to keep well in, but in strong winds against tide you should not go. We decided to have a look and could see the wall of water standing where the Peveril Point race began. I did not realise that when we started through we could not turn back as the tide was so strong. We headed for the wall and after being thrown about for a while came through it, next came the Durlston Head race. We were all clipped on, but I knew St Alban's was worse, and by now the tide was in full spring ebb and the wind was force 5 against it. I desperately suggested anchoring or going back but we were being carried along too fast. Bryn, who always looks on the bright side, said it would be over quickly (the race is quite narrow but extends 3 miles out). We hoped if we stayed close in, on the chandlers' advice, it would be alright. From far off, we saw a huge wall of water with white on top, and I was terrified; George who was now 4 was with us on deck. We were sucked hopelessly towards it, and my heart sank as we climbed the wall. To my horror we balanced on the top, propeller thrashing in the air, only to become airborne! I clutched onto George as he was lifted off the deck, as if on a roller coaster. I thought the end was nigh as we crashed into the trough, imagining Gwendoline would shatter into a thousand pieces, but no, we were on our way up the next standing wave, with

no damage! Bryn was holding on to the tiller, staring ahead, no one spoke for a few minutes as the process was repeated, until George said "I don't want to go to Poole again!" The experience made us realise how tough Shrimpers are, and to have great confidence in our little boat!

Yacht Master Practical

My enthusiasm for sailing grew and over the next few years I attempted my Yacht Master Practical, meaning I had to complete two 60 mile passages as skipper. The first I did with a girlfriend crew, starting from Salcombe at 21.00 to sail overnight to Poole, (80 miles). We had little wind but mist all the way. I don't have a GPS and had worked out a plan to take us 5 miles south of Portland Bill in slack water, then pick up the fair tide to Poole. We had time to spare, to allow for sailing, if at all possible. The tides are confusing off the Bill, and my friend was concerned as to where we were. At 08.00 we heard on the VHF, the Portland coastguard saying the visibility was 5 miles, just as we caught sight of the top of Portland's cliffs over the mist. The bearing proved we were almost exactly where I had plotted our position. My friend was impressed and I felt quite proud!

On my second qualifying trip we left Poole at 17.00 and the wind died, soon afterwards the engine went on a go slow and I wished I had done the engine course! I tried to bleed the fuel system, which improved it for a while and we continued until 5 miles south of Portland Bill, when I had a lot more trouble and nearly turned back, however it perked up in the nick of time. We were by now running late but still in time to make

Salcombe before the tide turned so we started planning which restaurant to go to; fatal! Just as we reached Prawl Point the wind died again and despite all my efforts, the engine would only do one knot. At the same moment my friend spotted the crew of a small fishing boat calling to us from right under the rocks. I said we couldn't rescue anyone in our state but then thought perhaps they could fix our engine and we could tow them in. They had a rope round their prop and wanted us to radio for help. I said we should try to sort it out ourselves first and started blowing up the dinghy so they could free the rope, while the crew tried to fix our engine. A coastguard appeared suddenly on the top of the cliff saying he would get the lifeboat to give us a tow in. I said "no no" we were sorting the problem out, but he said they would "enjoy the trip out!" They came so quickly and at 23.30 we arrived at Salcombe. It was so embarrassing next morning when we found the only thing wrong with the engine was that the fuel filter had not been changed that winter - never again!

Holiday in the Scillies

Last year we sailed to the Scillies, after an adventurous launching at Sennen Cove, where boat and car careered out of control down the 10 foot high slip, luckily not falling off, but sinking into the soft sand at the bottom! We then had to be pulled out by a winch the fishing boats use. Despite fog on the way over to the Scillies we had a lovely time, finding good shelter in the shallow water between Tresco and Bryher. There are plenty of rocks to watch out for but it is well worth the trip. Needless to say we returned to Newlyn! This concludes my fond memories of Gwendoline.