

Sound people by Andrea Watson

Sue Reilly

Life should NOT be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in one hand, martini in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming "WOO HOO what a ride!" ----

Sue Reilly's email signature

Emails, much to the consternation of some writers, inadvertently reveal more than the writer intended. Such is not the case for Sue Reilly. Receive an email from Sue and you have a pretty good idea of how she thinks. And no matter how bad the day, you just have to end up smiling. Her joie de vivre is contagious as anyone who has spent some time with Sue can attest. "I'm a firm believer that if you are not having fun, you are doing something wrong and should change what you are doing." Following her own advice, she switched from being a semi-land-lubber (water skiing, tanning at the beach) and started sailing in a big way. Today, Sue is a competitive racer, PRO, judge and umpire and spends almost every moment away from work either on the water or near it – and a good percentage of all of her sailing activities, when not racing, is spent volunteering for the sailing community.

As is typical of Sue Reilly, she "started at the top." Her first race, actually the very first time she sailed, was a SORC race in Nassau during the heyday of the IOR. She admits she was "railmeat", but that race hooked her on sailing and she "has never looked back. "I have never had a bad day on the water – in storms, cold, becalmed – a day on the water is always better than a day at the office." That was 1982, and today her racing schedule takes her to St. Thomas, Tortola, Antigua, Newport, up and down the east coast, and races on the Sound.

There is nothing about Sue Reilly that is half-baked; she embraced anything sailing-related with gusto. After racing for two months at various venues on the Sound in 1982 she got an invitation from a friend to learn sailmaking in Newport. Again, Sue started at the top, working (for no pay, at least for the first year) with the in-house sail loft for Dennis Conner's Freedom syndicate. Why sailmaking? "It had an exotic ring to say I was a sailmaker," so when her friend offered to teach her everything about it, she rented a room from a friend, got into sailmaking, met her future husband, and had the time of her life. The newfound career was a natural for this arts and crafts-type person, who is very skilled at working with her hands. Her love of jigsaw puzzles came in handy when sails arrived in pieces and she had to put them together - There were times when parts were missing, and she had to build them. Although Sue now works for a telecommunications firm, she misses making sails and expects to one day go back to it.

Frostbiting got Sue into race management. She and her husband Matthew Flood moved to Essex, CT because he had raced in frostbite regattas there during college, and they liked the whole Essex sailing scene. Once frostbiting season started, her husband suggested she join the race committee. She hopped on the committee boat that spring and fall and spent the next 17 learning the ropes, starting as a novice com-

mittee member, then chief scorer, Vice-Commodore and Commodore. She is now a past-Commodore of the Essex Frostbite YC.

Her work on the frostbite race committee started a long friendship with Peter "Luigi" Reggio. Luigi watched her work and offered tips, and it was Luigi who dragged her up

to a Sail Newport regatta to introduce her to the Newport crowd. They must have liked what they saw because they kept calling Sue back to do more regattas. Through Luigi, Sue met the late David "Fang" Kilponen, did a few regattas with him, where they would spend at least one night "smoking many cigarettes and drinking rum until 5 in the morning, talking about everything in the world. He suggested I go into judging and umpiring, and got me down to the Rolex Farr International regatta. That got the ball rolling for me." Most of Sue's race management work is volunteer, except for the NOOD regatta work that Luigi sends her way. She "does a lot for colleges and local clubs that can't find certified judges. I can't say no, especially if I have a free weekend." Sue is presently training to be an umpire, a new adventure that will open more doors for this dynamo.

A typical week for Sue is packed with activity. She leaves work early on Monday to go to Newport for her umpiring course, she works Tuesday, races on Wednesday night, and is back after work on Thursday to race on an Etchells. Friday is her night off from sailing, unless a long regatta is scheduled. Saturday and Sunday are filled with either judging in Newport, umpiring or running races on the home front, arriving back home on Sunday evening to prepare for another week of the same. "I need to keep myself busy, need planned activities, or I get bored. I am doing this because I really like being around people, it's a lot of fun – I get to spend the day on the water."

One of Sue's biggest thrills was one Key West Race Week. A guy that Sue and her husband had met the year before was putting together a Tartan 10 program, and since they didn't have a ride, agreed to race with him. "The first day was kind of awkward - We hadn't sailed with any of them, and it took a little getting used to the people. We made a lot of mistakes during Sunday practice, but by Monday morning we went out and everything clicked. By the end of the week we took a second for the regatta. We all got along so well, on land and on the boat. It was almost perfect - if not perfect, then pretty darn close - for a pickup crew put together two weeks before the event."

This enterprising woman, who started sailing because it was "like playing a game of chess on the water, with no two races ever the same," is having a bundle of fun. "I am meeting good people, having a good time, and have a lot of support from my husband – I am one of the luckiest people in the world, I think. When it stops being fun I won't do it any more, but I don't foresee that anytime in the near future." ♦

