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# Racing to cruising?

## No big deal for W971; fresh off Nationals win, Millers tackle the Chesapeake

By Paul (& Dawn) Miller  
W971

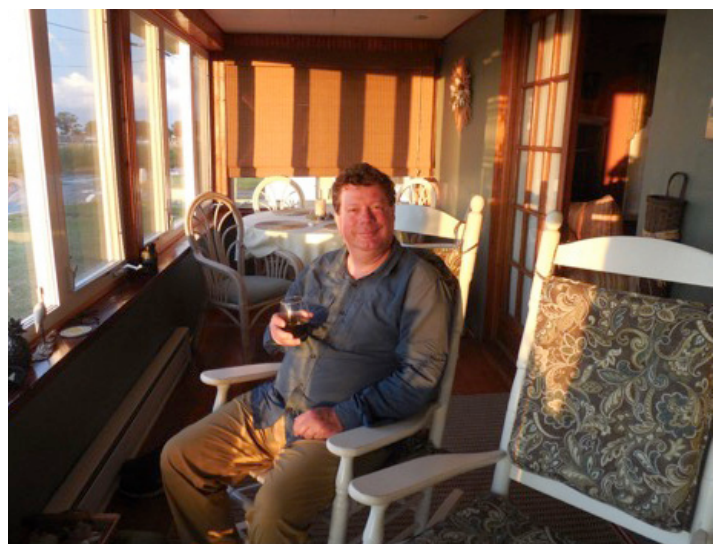
Sometimes you know immediately if you made a good decision. One example is deciding to drink milk on the day it expires – when you take a sip you immediately know if it was a good decision. Other decisions might take years to become clear.

For us, one decision we made four years ago became clear near “G3” on Tangier Sound. More about that later. This article is about the 2021 Wayfarer Chesapeake Cruise, held from June 22 to June 24. Like many Wayfarer activities we’ve done, our involvement started with Uncle Al (Schonborn W3854) planting a seed.

Originally, we planned to participate in the 2020 cruise but, as with most non-essential activities around the world, that was curtailed by the pandemic. With the availability of vaccines starting in February, I wrote Uncle Al asking if it was on for this year. We emailed back and forth and decided to plan for it, “just in case.”

Trying to delay the cruise as long as possible, and to encourage a large turnout, we decided to dovetail it behind the

continued on page 6



Dawn and Paul Miller were greeted with warm hospitality by Crisfield, Smith Island and Tangier Island proprietors and residents throughout their stay. The Mystic, Conn. sailors encountered varied winds for their Chesapeake cruise thanks to a strong cold front. *All photos by Dawn and Paul Miller*

# Chesapeake

continued from page 5

Governor's Cup/USWA Nationals at Kerr Lake, N.C. The idea was to sail in the Nationals, spend a day driving to Crisfield, Md., and then cruise Tuesday through Friday. Normally the cruise starts on Tuesday after Memorial Day and we feared pushing it back a few weeks would lead to: excessive heat (which didn't happen due to a strong cold front), excessive bugs (we might have seen one the entire time), and excessive tourists (we saw two). At one point six boats were planning on attending, but due to various reasons, the others dropped like greenheads on a windy day. Only W971 was able to make it.

The drive from Kerr Lake to Crisfield took about six hours and the highlight was taking the 18-mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge/Tunnel across the mouth of the bay. Right as we got to the first tunnel, a naval vessel that is rarely seen was being towed through the narrow gap. Quite a sight! We arrived in Crisfield near dinnertime and checked in at the Capt. Tyler Motel (aka Stagecoach). Donna, the proprietor, had emailed us that Room 3 would be unlocked and waiting for us. We then walked two blocks to Johnny Sweet's for a pound of steamed shrimp covered in Old Bay Seasoning and a cheese covered, crab-stuffed, broiled jumbo pretzel. Yum! As the restaurants' AC was barely functioning in the 95-degree heat, we brought dinner back to our room and downed it with some frosty beverages.

While things were looking good on the food front, another front, mainly the strong cold front mentioned above, was looking worrisome. The plan was to sail 15 miles west from Crisfield to Maryland's only offshore island, Smith Island (surprisingly not named for Capt. John Smith). Unfortunately, Tuesday's



W871 tucked in safely for the night (above) at the Parks Marina on Tangier Island. The Millers had planned to sail from Crisfield to Smith Island for a stay at a B&B, but opted to hop the island mail boat instead because of looming bad weather. By the time they docked at the island, the boat was engulfed in a near-zero visibility line squall.

weather forecast was for winds from the west at 25-35 knots, numerous heavy rainsqualls, 65 degrees, and seas of 3-4 feet. That sounded about as much fun as filling out the 1040 long form.

Not wanting to challenge Frank and Margaret Dye's "iron man/woman" reputations, we decided to adjust our plan slightly. Instead of sailing to Smith Island, we would motor to it. Precisely at noon on Tuesday we showed up at the Crisfield Town Dock and introduced ourselves to Captain Otis, the skipper of the Smith Island mailboat, *Island Belle 2*, and the husband of our hostess at the B&B, "Susan's on Smith Island." Along with us and half a ton of mail, packages, and cargo, the passenger list included five Smith Island residents, some of whom commented it was one of the roughest trips they had experienced in years.

An hour and a half later we docked in a near-zero visibility line squall. We decided the \$20 one-way fare was well worth the trip! After waiting for 15 minutes for the squall to blow through, we were offered a lift by Janet, Susan's sister (we would meet many of the Evans

family during our stay).

We were the only guests that night and Janet showed us around the house before we dashed off in the rain to the fascinating museum and on to the Bay Side Inn for a late lunch/early dinner of cream of crab soup, crab cakes, and Smith Island cake sundaes. Although the food was fantastic, we were the only guests at the restaurant.

The Smith Islanders really seemed to care about our happiness during our stay. Fearing that the restaurant would not stay open late enough for us to eat (3:30), Donna, Otis, Susan and Janet all phoned Betty to make sure she would be open. Needless to say, we had a warm greeting from Betty when we walked in! Feeling stuffed to the gills, we stepped outside to the sun-after-the-storm (70 degrees and no humidity!) and went back to the B&B to sit on the porch, sip some nice Cabernet (Smith Island is "dry" but you can drink in homes) and watch the stunning kind of sunset that only comes after a storm.

The night went quickly on an incred-

continued on page 7

Summer 2021

# Chesapeake

continued from page 6

ibly comfortable bed and too soon we smelled the maple-infused, thick-slabbed bacon that Susan cooked us (along with some healthy fruit and berries) before we caught the 0730 boat back to Crisfield.

What a difference 24 hours can make! Wednesday greeted us with 5-8 knots from the north, 65-70 degree temps and virtually no humidity. We picked up the car and boat from the overnight parking at the Tawes Brother's lot (\$3 for each, dropped in a lockbox and three blocks from the pier). After buying some lunch fixings and ice from Food Lion we drove around the harbor to the Somers Cove Marina ramp next to the Coast Guard Station (\$8 per day - drop a check or cash in the box).

It took us about an hour and a half to convert W971 from "racing" to "cruising" mode. This included stuffing a plastic box that contained the anchor, rode, chart and some extra mooring lines, plus another box that had spares and tools into the stern compartment. The "cruising" sails from the early '70s, sporting new reef points Dawn sewed in this winter, were bent on. The dry bags of gear went in the bow compartment and, perhaps most importantly, the ice chest was tucked under one of the reinstalled aft "cruising" seats. We launched, hoisted the sails, threaded our way through the marina's small exit. After clearing the harbor, we set a course of 220 degrees magnetic for Tangier Island, 15 miles away and below the horizon.

What happened over the next three and half hours was one of the most pleasant sails in memory. The wind stayed aft of the beam all the way to the island and varied from 4-8 knots. The cruising spinaker went up and was hardly touched. There was barely a cloud in the sky and the temperature was in the Goldilocks range, not too hot nor too cold!

Slowly, Tangier Island started showing above the horizon. First we saw the water tank, then the forested southern part and, about three hours after leaving Crisfield, we rounded "1E" and sailed straight up the Eastern Channel.

A turn to starboard and after passing numerous crab shacks, we easily found and tied up at the nearly empty Parks Marina. Tying W971's stern off to a pil-



Three hours after leaving Crisfield, Paul and Dawn landed at Tangier Island (top). As they sailed along the waterfront, they were viewed curiously by the watermen arriving back to port in their crab skiffs (above).

ing on one side and the bow diagonally off to the finger pier we were able to suspend her in the slip and allow for the three-foot tidal range.

Walking up to the marina office, we were greeted by Milton Parks, who at 92 years young, was quick to ask about where all the other Wayfarers were. After a half-hour fun conversation, he charged us \$10 versus the regular \$25 for boats under 30 feet. About the same time, a 35-foot cruising sailboat came in from Deltaville, Va. They had to pay \$30.

As we exited the marina, we bumped into Barb, our hostess for the night. She came by to drop off some guests for the evening ferry back to Crisfield. (Sidebar: for those who want to accompany their sailors on the cruise but not actually sail in the Wayfarer, the Smith and Tangier ferries are quite convenient and comfortable!)

As the guests had driven two golf carts from the hotel (actually it was more like a motel, but as the island has almost no cars but tons of golf carts, would it be a cart-tel?) to the dock, we were asked to drive one back while Barb gave us a

narrated island tour from her cart. We learned about the various restaurants, stores, landmarks and that the highest point on the island is a small bridge over an inlet.

We checked in at the nicely-furnished Brigadune (our reservation at the Bay View was cancelled the night before due to a sewage backup) and then took a walking tour of the island, with a stop at Lorraine's Restaurant for more crab cakes. The sunset on Wednesday night was not as dramatic as Tuesday's, but was still stunning and was viewed from an odd location, the over-run portion of the airport runway. Luckily no planes needed it while we were there.

We noticed that, uncharacteristically for the Chesapeake in late June, it was actually cold and the wind was picking up rather than dropping off. Shades of things to come.

Thursday's forecast had changed numerous times, but by the morning it had settled to NE 13 gusting 18 with the wind slowly veering to the east and temps in the low 70s. Unfortunately, the

continued on page 8

# Chesapeake

continued from page 7

course back to Crisfield was 030, almost dead to windward, and even worse, the long, narrow, eastern channel at Crisfield is aligned NE-SW. The options were to either take the much easier western channel and sail around the southern tip of the island, adding about 4-5 miles to the trip, or short tack out the eastern channel. We debated the two over a great breakfast at the Fisherman's Corner restaurant, where the owner joined us and described more about island life and what brought her to live there.

Hmm, which course to choose? The easy and safe answer was the western one, but our thinking went along the lines of, "let's see how hard the eastern is; we can always turn around!" We tucked a reef in the main, left the jib tied down to the deck (our cruising jib has hanks) and raised the board a quarter of the way to balance the helm. Off we went. The sail along the waterfront coincided with some crab skiffs heading in and each waterman looked at us curiously and waved.

We turned the corner and started out the fairway. Yup, dead to windward, about a mile of short tacking in a 50-yard wide channel. We went for it! I suggested to Dawn that she should start counting the tacks. That was a mistake as she quickly got bored and broke out in song...

(sung to the tune of 99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall)

99 tacks in Tangier Sound,

99 tacks in the Sound,

You sheet it in and tack it around,

99 tacks in Tangier Sound,

98 tacks in Tangier Sound... (you get the idea)!

We lost count at around a hundred tacks. Eventually, after only grounding the centerboard once, we passed "1E" and then "G3" and set up on the long starboard tack for Crisfield. By that time we noticed the forecast was a little off. The wind was NE, but it was more like 15 gusting 22 and the seas were 2-3 feet. Quite sporty.

With just the reefed main up and sheeted over the transom corner to maintain drive in the waves, we tacked through about 100 degrees and were going about four knots. Pretty good for a 16-foot boat in those conditions. The passage was occasionally a bit wet, but relatively comfortable and always in total control.

Just as we reached the halfway point (conveniently marked by "R6"), the Tangier ferry passed us a hundred yards off. We waved and some passengers waved back. I wonder what they thought? Did they pity or envy us? Did any think we were in trouble? Half an hour later the Crisfield Coast Guard boat came roaring up, slowly passed us, waved and sped off along our wake. A little bit later they came roaring back towards us, slowed and waved again. I wonder if one of the passengers rattled on us.



Room 3 in Crisfield had been spruced up with some glitter "disco" decor.

The breeze continued to veer and eventually lightened near Crisfield, so we set the jib and sailed in with a dying easterly.

We hauled out at the ramp, spent an hour de-rigging and packing up, swung by the self-serve car wash to get the salt off the boat, car and trailer, and returned to our now-familiar Room 3 at the Captain Tyler's Motel. Intriguingly, Donna switched the pillows to some glitter "disco" pillows, making the room seem a bit like the "hourly rooms" in

the movies. She chuckled when I mentioned it, and offered me a kitten (seriously, she had six to find homes for).

As it was Thursday night and Crisfield was coming alive for the approaching weekend, the Fisherman's Grille was open, which allowed us to sit on the waterfront out of the sun and enjoy the Happy Hour specials, and a final day of crab.

Friday we started driving north, stopping for an hour at the Queenstown outlets to chat with Jeremy Gordon of Chicago, the enthusiastic new owner of W2409, a glass Mark 1 he is learning to rig and day sail. Hopefully he will be up for one of our rallies.

We found slow traffic both around Philadelphia and New York City and rolled into our driveway in Mystic around 9 o'clock. The next day Dawn unpacked the car and boat while I taught a beginner motorcycle class.



Paul skippers W971 through the Chesapeake waters.

That wraps up the Wayfarer Cruise 2021, but, I started this article with a comment about decisions. What was the decision we made four years ago and was it a good or bad one? The decision was to buy a Wayfarer. Was it a good decision? Well, no. It was actually a great decision!

We wanted a wood boat that we could race competitively and yet cruise comfortably. We were fairly competitive at the Nationals and, as far as cruising comfortably, our minds were made up just about the time we rounded "G3" north of Tangier Island. A 22-knot gust hit at the same time as a large wave set. W971 simply heeled a bit, pushed some spray aside, and kept on going. We were very impressed! Having sailed over 300 small boat designs in my life, I can honestly say I've never sailed a boat that could both race and cruise that well. We'll be back next year!