

Help fight retinal disease by supporting our boat in the

Sail for Sight Regatta



Saturday, July 10, 2004
Annapolis to Baltimore

This summer, our boat will be competing in the 16th Annual Sail for Sight Regatta and MRSA Race to Baltimore, presented by The Baltimore City Yacht Association, Magothy River Sailing Association, and MBNA for the benefit of the Foundation Fighting Blindness. More than 700 sailors from Maryland and surrounding areas will participate in this exciting race to raise funds for an important cause: the fight against blindness. Over the past fifteen years, more than \$750,000 has been raised by sailors, supporters and corporate sponsors through the Sail for Sight Regatta. These funds have helped to fund important research and programs to cure and treat retinal degenerative diseases that affect over six million Americans.

For us (and the event) to be successful, we need your help. By sponsoring our boat with a financial contribution, you can help us reach our fundraising goals while supporting further research into retinal degenerative diseases.

We need to receive your contribution by Friday, July 9, in order to count it toward our total, so please take a moment today to fill out the form on the next page and return it to us or to the Foundation today.

You may also be interested in a great article about the event that appeared in *Spinsheet* last summer, written by Baltimore's own Stephanie Stone. It's on the pages that follow.

Thanks in advance for your support!



16th Annual Sail for Sight Regatta
Benefiting
The Foundation Fighting Blindness
Baltimore, MD
2004 Donation Form

Name of Crewmember or Individual Fundraiser

Please return this form, with your donation, by July 9th to:

FFB
Attention: Sail for Sight
11435 Cronhill Drive
Owings Mills, MD 21117

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Instructions

Please utilize the front of the form, if making a single donation and the back if collecting pledges. Feel free to make copies of the pledge form, as needed, and fill out completely and legibly.

Print Your Name Clearly

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Company Name (if applicable) [] Check here if matching funds are available from your company

Street Address _____ Apt./Suite # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip code _____

Phone Number (please include for credit card donations) _____ Email Address _____

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Matching Gifts

Many companies provide their employees with matching gifts/pledges. Please attach your matching gift form when you send in your donation.

Two Easy Payment Options

- 1. Personal Check: Please make check payable to FFB Sail for Sight.
- 2. Credit Card: Mastercard Visa American Express

Account # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Name on Card _____

Please charge \$ _____ to my credit card.

**Any Questions?
Call us at (410) 568-0160.**

A copy of The Foundation's financial statement is available by writing to The Foundation Fighting Blindness, 11435 Cronhill Drive, Owings Mills, MD 21117-2220 or by calling (410) 568-0150. Copies of documents and information required by the Maryland charitable organizations law may be obtained for the cost of copies and postage by writing to the Secretary of State, Charitable Division, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401.



Baltimore Via Bermuda: The Story Behind Sail for Sight

by Stephanie Stone

Imagine that you have set out in a 36-foot boat to cross the ocean. The boat is sea kindly and well-equipped for offshore passage making. She has a self-tacking jib, fully battened main, and a boom brake that protects against accidental jibes in lumpy seas. She has SAT NAV and autopilot in addition to windvane steering, SSB, radar, B & G instruments, and a state of the art life raft. You have sailed 2500 offshore miles with a dedicated crew to help prepare for this trip.

Underway at last, you cross the shipping lanes uneventfully and log 1100 miles. Then the SAT NAV and autopilot fail and you decide to put into Bermuda. This is when you discover that the beat to Bermuda will be into the teeth of a hurricane. You spend the next 48 hours on the helm, with the seas increasing to 15 feet, and get to within 15 miles of St. George. Finally, exhausted, you must sleep so you lower all sails, but in your sleep-deprived state forget to rig the drogue. When you wake up, you've been blown 30 miles downwind. You rig the drogue off the stern—the wind has increased to 60 knots and the boat is making three knots under bare poles and dodger. When the wind gets to 70 knots, you turn the instruments off—no need for more news in that arena—and with the help of a bottle of wine try to get some sleep.

The boat is stable until she falls off a wave and lands on her side. You awake with settee cushions from the other side of the salon in your face. You scramble up the ladder to the cockpit—in your sleepy state, it takes you a couple of seconds to realize that you are climbing sideways. She's taken on no water—in fact, your shoes are still in the cockpit. The boat lies on her side for a minute that seems to stretch into forever. Then she rights herself and on you go. The next two days, you spend a lot of time talking with Bermuda radio until the worst of the storm has passed and you are able to make Bermuda.

Now imagine that you are blind and alone.

For those of us who struggle to sail well with all our senses intact, this story borders on unbelievable. It does to me. But Jim Dickson, the man behind BCYA's hugely successful Sail for Sight Regatta, made this passage in the Freedom 36, "Eye Openner." Jim has retinitis pigmentosa with juvenile macula degeneration. This means that he has been losing his sight steadily since the first grade. At the time he sailed to Bermuda, he had enough sight left so that he could use the radar, once Raytheon technicians had tuned the display so that the blips were enlarged to ½ inch. All the "read outs" from instruments were via voice synthesizer. To help trim the sails, Jim whipped line in different patterns into main and jib sheets so he could feel close-hauled, beam and broad reach settings. The unstayed flexible carbon fiber mast, fully battened main and jib stiffener also helped the sails keep the right shape.

A year after his Bermuda adventure, Jim, along with Jeff Holland and then Baltimore City Yacht Association (BCYA) commodore Bill Hahn, put together the idea of the Sail for Sight regatta. That was in the late 80s. In the 15 years since then, Sail for Sight has raised \$750,000 for the Foundation Fighting Blindness. July's event raised \$82,000. Since its inception, BCYA has played the pivotal role in promoting, organizing and running Sail for Sight. Jim is unstinting in his praise: "They deserve a huge amount of credit for this thing. They made it their baby. I can't say enough about them." Other sponsors of the 2003 event were the Magothy River Sailing Association and MBNA. Fifty-seven boats, ranging from PHRF A1 to multihulls—raced from Baltimore Light to Baltimore Harbor. Fifteen J22s and Sonars frolicked—and wiped out—in a fresh breeze off Ft. McHenry: the Sonar Paralympic hopeful, Greece Lightning, won that event. Skipper Chris Murphy and his two crew have two workable legs and four good eyes among them.



Two torrential downpours did not dampen the after race party at the Baltimore Marine Center. Six hundred people ate and drank and danced to the driving Caribbean beat of Mama Jama. In true sailor spirit, servers continued to pour drinks in the rain, proving once again that beer is thicker than water.

To me, the loss of sight seems such an enormous disability, I asked Jim if he found any advantage to sailing blind. He said, "I'm much more sensitive to a number of things, like how the boat sits in the water and how the water is reacting. A sailboat is a kinetic device—all you need is a talking device to tell you where you're going." In fact, this was one of the problems Jim faced when he steered to windward in big seas on the way to Bermuda—the lag on the voice from the compass made it hard for him to get the feedback quick enough to prevent oversteering.

Jim doesn't agree with the notion that loss of vision makes other senses more acute. It's that all the other senses compensate, he says. Each sense

has its own volume. Vision is the loudest and drowns out the others, but in its absence, others come to the fore. It just takes time to interpret them. For example, he says he's become more sensitive to barometric pressure—in 19 years sailing on the Bay, he's never been caught in a thunderstorm with his sails up.

Jim's explanation squares with my own experience. "Loud vision" is a problem my sailing students often struggle with—they are so busy looking that they don't "feel" the boat. On the basis of our talk, I am going to practice driving with my eyes closed. (Then, if I survive, I'll try it out on my students!)

So, it was a circuitous journey from Portsmouth to Bermuda to Baltimore. But a journey unified by the themes of bravery, friendship, perseverance, and a love of sailing. Jim sums it up—"Spread the word. Keep sailing."

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