

## Always Listen When a Boat Speaks

### Part Two. A *Silent Conversation, Spoken Loudly*

It was the old man in my dream... speaking to me!

It was a whispering voice. talking to ME! Chatting to me like he was an old friend. Invisible yet, his voice was as clear as if he sat in the cockpit with me.

“He” talked about the weather, asked how I like the boat, what my jacket cost, and who I thought would win the World Series of 1978? A game decades old. I sat there stunned. The voice was a soft whisper. Sometimes I had to strain to hear it. So scared I couldn’t answer his questions. He kept on chatting about things that were either arcane or pointless. Based on his chatter about everyday things, I began to feel like he was just trying to be friendly.

Finally, I found my courage, got my own voice back, and shakily asked, “Who are you? “ , “Why are you here? “  
He whispered. “ I’m Lester Black. I used to own this boat. I can help you.”,  
“Why can’t I see you? Why am I just hearing your voice?” I asked.

“I’m here in front of you. I am the boat. It and I are one. I am living fiberglass and epoxy. I am the metal fittings and stays, the cloth of its sail; I am the influence that makes true mariners of all who use this vessel.  
He certainly did that. To me.

At first “we” entered “Round the Buoy” races so I could learn how to listen to the whispered tactics from Les. From the moment “*Sasayaki*” came on the courses, “He” would guide me. Finding those hidden winds, the favorable currents and instructing when to tweak sails. We won races in conditions that were close being cancelled because of no winds or too much. We would ghost across finish lines, while other boats lay in windless lulls. There were times when I laughed at Gale force storms. I knew that no tempest would keep us from flying by the committee boat. Other boats were being damaged, masts down, sails shredded, while I sat in the cockpit sipping tea!

It wasn’t long before I realized the. He.. was CONTROLLING the races. Changing winds and water conditions to our advantage. At the same time making the competition experience every imaginable difficulty. No wind, too much wind, fouling boats, adverse currents, anything to stop or slow down the other boats. With his control, we never lost!

We entered all the prestigious races, winning every one of them. Soon, our reputation was known worldwide. Sailing magazines began publishing stories about us with titles like “, How does he do it? “. Every interviewer asked the question, “What is your Secret”.  
I always answered that I just navigated the racecourse for its advantages. I never told them I had a ghost who changed conditions at will. There was no way I’d ever lose listening to his whispered instructions.

It wasn’t long before we were aware that what had begun as friendly sailing contests, was now War.  
We were the “enemy”, they, had become the vanquished.

Several individuals and associations secretly offered rewards to anyone who would try to damage the boat or incapacitate me. Of course, Lester always knew who they were and how to avoid

any such actions. He managed somehow to expose those individuals and sailing associations responsible. They were permanently banned because of the evidence given to authorities. No one knew how the evidence got to them. Who would believe a ghost had delivered it?

A year later, after winning the prestigious “Os ventos de Lisboa” race in Portugal, I asked him the questions I’d been avoiding. “Why are you part of this boat? Why are you mentoring me? “  
I now wish I’d never asked.

He began the story that still haunts me to this day.  
He and his wife, Alice, had lived a “normal “life.. Shortly after they married, they began talking about how they might experience new worlds that were unknown to them.

They bought a brand new sailboat and began setting it up for sailing the world.  
Selling off all their land-based possessions, they were going to live and sail for as long as they could on this boat. It was going to be their continuing honeymoon.

Their continuing honeymoon ended.. tragically !

For a few years, the couple sailed to places that most of us fantasize about. Each new port they found, was a dream come true. They were living that dream.

At the end of their 6<sup>th</sup> year, the tragedies began. The dreams became nightmares.

First, a crushing financial disaster. Damaged in a storm, repairing the boat had taken most of their savings. Friends helped but they still struggled just to keep living.  
Each day brought more troubles..

Then, it was the worst day of his life. His beloved wife, Alice was killed!

It was a horrible accident! Sitting in their boat’s cockpit, she was crushed by a crane tipping over onto her.

He was inconsolable, wouldn’t eat, couldn’t sleep. He mourned for weeks. His health failed. He became mentally and physically frail. One stormy night off the coast of Mexico, while working on the foredeck, he slipped and fell overboard.  
His body was never found.

The old man’s voice became faint and sounded far away.  
“My friend, I’ll answer your questions now. I am here to help you. To guide you to places few ever get to know. But heed my Warning! This boat was cursed the day it was launched. It murdered my Alice then took me. It’s an evil thing, This vessel devours anyone that loves it. It must kill to remain alive. All who own it, will die of it. They will become a shadow. Lost forever. .... I beg you...run away...!  
Friend, rid yourself of this abomination! “

His words grew fainter, until only the hushed sounds of wind could be heard.  
It was the last time I listened to the whispering voice of Lester Black. He was gone.  
I sat in silence for a long time.  
I’d lost a friend.  
I felt alone. Very alone.

Alone?

Well, not for long, as it turned out.

End... part two

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