

The blinding dream

We've all been there. We have all had our eyes and reason clouded by *THE DREAM*: Owning a boat, and sailing away from reality. After a beautiful day sailing on a continuous broad reach to be lounging in the cockpit at sunset, with a libation of choice in a soft breeze as the subtle motion of the water lulls us into that nirvana we have spent our lives dreaming about.

Well here is a tale of reality where one man's dream and failure to see truth resulted in a horrible, costly mistake.

We were moored in the Georgetown Basin on Maryland's Sassafra River. The boat on the next mooring was a sorry looking 48-foot ferro-cement ketch with blue plastic tarps as cockpit covers and a tremendous amount of boxes and crates on deck. After a couple of days of waiting out strong winds, I noticed an older man on deck busy with a project. I waved hello, and he yelled over that he had just taken ownership of this vessel and that he was totally and completely overwhelmed. He asked if I could row over and give him my opinion of some of the issues he believed he had.

I dinged over, and what I saw was unlike anything I had ever seen in my life. The gentleman told me that he had just purchased the boat on eBay, that he now thought that he'd made the biggest mistake of his life. He said that he'd always had a dream of buying a sailboat and sailing to the Caribbean. Recently he had just completed a horrible divorce and with what little money he had left he decided to try and realize his dream and bring some happiness and adventure back into his life after such a dark chapter.

He told me that he had never owned a sailboat before and that after a few days of cleaning out a dumpster full of trash, he now was concerned that he was way over his head.

I stepped on board, and the first thing I noticed was

that the helm appeared to be nonfunctioning and there were no instruments. Once below, everywhere I looked I saw decay and degradation. The electrical panel was hanging by two wires suspended in mid-air, and the owner was lamenting that only one light worked. The Westerbeke diesel had a waterline halfway up the side and had clearly been submerged. The Racor filter showed only water in the bottom bowl.

I told the owner not to try and start the engine and then asked if he had checked the tankage. He gave me a puzzled look and said he did not know where to look. We pulled up a warped plywood floorboard, and what I saw still gives me the willies. The tank hatch was missing, and floating in some unknown chemical liquid were rusted paint cans and some type of solidus material. The unholy smell of toxic chemical was overwhelming.

Everywhere I looked the fixtures were either disconnected or beyond repair. Nothing, and I mean *nothing*, looked functional or sound. I then noticed that the whole starboard side of the hull was covered in what appeared to be mud, while the port side showed no evidence of mud, just a layer of dirt and grime. This clearly indicated to me that the vessel had been submerged and had lain on its starboard side for some time. I told this poor gentleman that he should immediately tow the boat to a marina, haul the boat, empty all tanks, and get a marine surveyor to evaluate the extent of the repairs necessary to allow for re-launching of the boat.

The poor owner nearly began sobbing in his frustration and feeling of hopelessness. He again reiterated that he was so overcome by his dream of sailing away and recapturing the adventure and lust for life that his vision and reason had been completely blinded. He told me that not only did he not have the funds to even begin the repairs necessary but that he also had none

of the skill sets or physical stamina to do any of the costly repairs himself. He kept saying that this purchase was the biggest mistake of his life and that he had no idea what he was going to do.

I suggested he do nothing with any of the systems until the boat was out of the water; only then should he strip everything off the boat and start over. I told him that I would start at the engine and tankage, and then, if the hull checked out to be sound (by a licensed marine surveyor), maybe once the engine was functional and the tankage and wiring were either replaced or repaired, he might see light at the end of the long dark tunnel.

After a long pause, he said that he would probably clean the boat up a bit and then relist it on eBay. He said he'd take a loss since he did not have the wherewithal to take on this huge project.

I had restored four sailboats, cruised extensively, and lived aboard, and nothing I had ever seen compared to the deplorable condition of this derelict. As I motored back to my boat, I had an epiphany about the ease with which one can be deluded by "The Dream," and how anyone at anytime can step off the edge of reason and sanity and chase the sailing fantasy down the wrong rabbit hole. This experience reminded me of my first foray into purchasing a sailboat. I found a McGregor 25 I was convinced was my ticket into boating. I brought a good friend with boating experience to

look at it, and the first thing he noticed were the dozens of holes drilled into the outboard engine cover. The broker told us that it was done to improve the ventilation for the engine, that it was *NO PROBLEM*. My dear friend smacked me on the forehead and said that the broker was full of it and that it was a *BIG PROBLEM*. Because of his unclouded vision, I walked away from that nightmare and ended up with a Boston Whaler Harpoon as my first boat at the ripe-old age of 23.

The last thing the hapless owner of the cement ketch said was that he was done with boats and would never consider owning another one again. How sad to kill "The Dream" after a wrong turn. We all make mistakes, and as long as we learn from them, there is hope and recovery. No matter how much experience a boater has, it's imperative that one physically sees the boat first and is accompanied by a knowledgeable friend who can help keep him grounded and keep the rose-colored glasses off. Finally, before purchasing a vessel, regardless of size, hire a marine surveyor.

Residents of Topsham, Maine, the Schoenbergs are on their second cruise from Maine to the Bahamas as a family (wife Chris, daughter Rachel 16, sons Jacob, 14, and Eli, 8). They left Maine aboard their Whitby 42 last September, and in early February were in the Southern Exumas of the Bahamas.



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