

Friday 8:55 AM, May 25 Will Haynie, Aboard E's Alee

I'm not sure where to begin. If I described the frustration, the weather, and the disappointments we've been through on E's Alee the last 48 hours, you might not believe me. For us, the race is lost. After 48 hours of trying to buck 30 MPH headwinds and seas easily running 20 feet, we calculated that it was mathematically impossible to complete the race before the time limit expired, so yesterday afternoon, still over 200 miles out, we fired up the engine and headed for Bermuda. Shortly after that, as we watched the seas build even more, I watched a huge wave coming at us, roll harmlessly under E's Alee's stout hull, and heard instructor Scott Sale say, "There goes a thirty footer."

I don't know if any of you have ever made 3 knots against strong headwinds into seas this size for 3 days straight, but if you have, let's talk about our experiences when I get back. Right now, if the seas don't level out, and our engine can only push us along at 3.3 knots, we won't make Bermuda until late Saturday afternoon. Of course we are all sorely disappointed about the race and disappointed that our time in Bermuda will be less than 24 hours. But - - that's sailing. We knew from the start as all sailors do that we were at the mercy of the wind and the tide. Neither showed us much mercy this week. Missing our spouses, children, and home is a given. Being reunited with them is going to be very nice. It seems like we've been gone an eternity.

During one particularly harrowing moment, when my crewmate Scott Rogers and I were on watch, trying to steer safely in huge waves coming right at our bow, Scott said, "I think the first place I'm going to go when we reach Bermuda is a nice cigar shop." I told him, "I think I'll go with you, but the first place I'm going to go is to church - in fact, I've BEEN in church for the last two hours!" Now I understand more fully what my friend Lewis Hay means when he says, "Anyone who doesn't believe in God has never been in a small boat in a big storm."

But there is always something to be gained from every experience. Before this, none of us aboard would have believed that we could do a headsail change in 30 knots of wind with 15-20 foot waves, but our Ocean Sailing Academy instructors Steve and Scott showed us we could. None of us would have believed that we could be at the helm in these conditions in pitch blackness, soaking wet, 250 miles from land, and safely steer the sailboat, but now we know we can. None of us would have thought that under disappointing conditions, when our race is lost and we're still 3 days away from port, we could keep our composure with each other after another wet, cold, four-hour watch in the middle of the night, but now we know we can. I am not trying to discourage anyone reading this from trying this race. There have been wonderful moments, but these are the conditions we've faced, and this is the reality of our situation. That's what makes it an adventure.

And for all we've learned about ourselves out here, I was heartened by an email relayed to me from Janet Beckett's 4th grade class at Murray LaSaine Elementary - the students who came to see us off at the start - and now these great kids are calling themselves "sail students." Now because of some teamwork and a spirit of adventure, their horizons and their dreams are bigger, and that to me makes every trying moment of this race worthwhile.