

CRUISING NOTES – JULY 2018

By Bob Lapin, Cruising Coordinator

1. Rusty Skipper sails have been set up and are online on Priorities on the Sunday mornings of July 22 and 29.
2. A Calypso Orientations will be conducted for skippers on the morning of August 1. A refresher for existing Calypso skippers will be conducted in the afternoon.
3. Lessons learned: Four cruising skippers went out on June 15 to sail overnight and test out procedures for our planned Passage Making class. We sailed toward Benton Harbor for 8 hours, hove too and had a delightful meal on the water. The AIS (automated identification system) showed us that a large vessel was moving across our course and would pass 1.3 nautical miles in front of us in 17 minutes. We watched the 900 ft. ore carrier cross our bow 17 minutes later – lesson 1 – keep an eye on AIS and know how it works – it gives you the means to contact commercial shipping in your area. While eating, the AIS weather alert sounded. We knew there were storms up north and assumed that was what the alert was about. I have become very dependent on cell phone weather apps which are unavailable 30 miles off shore. We did not check VHF weather at that time lesson 2 – check VHF weather hourly and comment in the log. We also noticed that barometric pressure had dropped one millibar per hour.

At 2100, we set our watch system, headed to Michigan City and went to bed leaving the helmsman tethered to the jack lines. At 2330, the second watch came on deck and changed course to Chicago. The entire northern horizon was covered in thunderstorms which were at least 50 miles away. We consulted VHF weather and learned the storm was headed our way. We reefed the main, started the engine and headed to Chicago at 7 knots using the chart plotter to direct us (thanks Jeremy for updating it). Seven nautical miles outside Chicago, the storm hit with 30-35 kt winds and 4-6 ft. waves. We furled the jib and took the auto helm off so we could steer into the larger waves. The rain was so intense, we could no longer see the city lights. Separated from the thunderstorm was an eerie, lower-lying black cloud, shaped like a cigar covering the entire lake shore. Passing under it felt like passing under a bridge. I have no idea what it was. We arrived safely, went to sleep soundly for a couple of hours before awaking to clean up the boat.

In retrospect, once we realized we had a problem, we should have taken the time to identify our location and think about the best plan of action. Looking at a chart after the fact, we were 7-10 nautical miles from Michigan City at 2330 and could have easily found safety there before the storm hit. We realized that we were not prepared for a Passage Making class and cancelled our July class. We have a lot of procedures to develop and training to do before we will be ready.