

Ch1 Annapolis Yacht Club

Devin, age 12, stood on the busy outside dock of the Annapolis Yacht Club looking out onto Spa Creek and the Chesapeake. Anxious for the arrival of the ocean racer, Moveable Feast, he ignored the half dozen crews and boats on the dock around him - his eyes screwed up for all the glare. The rising sun, low across the Spa Creek, the water more bright light than blue, cold sequins dancing. He was on the lookout for Charles Ransom's 47 foot racer. Devin, tall sinewy, funny hat but him all serious, ready to explode from expectation.

His first offshore race. He was to race from Annapolis with the starting gun at noon on this beautiful May Friday - down the Chesapeake, beyond Norfolk, out onto the Atlantic, then north to the finish line and hopefully the winning gun at the entrance to the New York Harbor sometime on Sunday, perhaps on Monday with an elapsed time between two and three days – around 400 miles. Moveable Feast was being sailed up from her winter in the Caribbean. Antigua Race week under her belt, she was on her way north.

And the week after this spring feeder race to New York, on Memorial Day weekend, Dev would join in with over 100 other sailboat crews, at Newport Rhode Island, to race to the Azores off Portugal - a race to celebrate the 510th anniversary of Columbus's voyage to the New World. For Devin and his dad it was to be the race of their lives.

His dad, Frank Hussey – just Hussey to his friends – retired cop, now taught at NYU. He was as tall as his son but more of a force to be reckoned with - handsome with wavy salt and pepper hair. Kind of Clooneyish, but Clooney when he had a beard. Hussey was not yet fifty. Years ago he ran the marathon in the Elite Sub 3 club but wine changed all that.

He didn't teach on Fridays so they had driven down late Thursday from Long Island with a U-Haul van filled with six large bags of sails and cartons of provisions for the weekend distance race.

Ransom's sailmaker in Port Washington on Long Island's North Shore had made three new colorful spinnakers and an ultra light racing main. Ransom wanted to test them in offshore winds during this feeder race. “ We'll red line 'em before the big race“, he had said, “and see what breaks”. They also brought down a nylon blooper which, when coupled with an even bigger spinnaker, billowed out in front of the boat. Lifted by strong winds from behind the two ballooning sails somehow balanced Moveable Feast catapulting her downwind. The sixth bag contained MF's indestructible small heavy storm jib. Necessary to satisfy Offshore Racing Club safety rules; hopefully never needed.

The last hour had been spent helping his son unload the van onto the club lawn. Back and forth, along the brick walk - from the club turnaround to a pile near the main dock. Done, he had an hour and so he napped in the warmth of the morning sun atop the six sail bags, some bigger than a man.

A short healing nap later, Frank Hussey walked up to the clubhouse for an eye-opener, “it's noon in Bermuda”, he thought. “Ransom better hurry.”

The Annapolis YC was a rambling connected collection of chalky soft red brick and white shingled roomy extensions to an 1880 storage building off a dock at the mouth of the Spa Creek as it empties into the Chesapeake Bay. Originally owned by a Baltimore based coastal trader, shared by his friends to store their small recreational sailboats. Later as their number increased they pooled funds to compensate the trader and with the next generation it grew into a Club supported by and owned in perpetuity by the evolving membership. A few long dead blazer clad stalwart's pictures adorned the walls

and halls of the complex series of rooms. Their children had raced each other in the creek and out onto the Chesapeake. In time they needed to include a dark taproom where Hussey was headed. And later the necessities became the ballrooms and dining rooms with wide bright water views across well-tended lawns and gardens. Brick walks down to the water from the several structures. Separating lawns into areas for you to lay out your sails to tend them. Very picturesque.

Here he found solace. He liked his Bloody Mary very, very spicy - made in a shaker, served in a tall glass with no ice. Offshore sailing teaches you to not need ice in your drinks and to go without fresh milk in your cereal.

Half-way through his drink, feeling more human, Hussey walked over to the window. He looked across the flower beds - red and yellow crocuses - across the lawn onto the floating club dock. Devin stood at the far end, almost six feet tall. He had shorts on his sprinters legs. Other boys had joined him. Hussey smiled, thinking, "In shorts and he isn't freezing". He watched in wonderment and with silent humor, young under-dressed racers on the cold summer mornings before warm days or in the early spring or late fall. The crew would meet on some club dock and motor to the start perhaps an hour away often into stiff wet winds. The "kids" would be in a group near the wave soaked bow dressed in shorts and T 's as we in the "after-guard" would sit protected in the cockpit, at the wheel or drinking coffee but always dressed in foul weather gear and sweaters. And now Devin was one of the boys in the group of long skinny kids with funny caps at the end of the dock. Hussey knew what they were talking about, smiling, laughing – many good summers long ago, racing dinghies. His father gave him the Schuylkill River - warm memories. Now, thirty years later, he one of the fathers - easily chilled, easily worried? - He smiled, looking out for weather signs - clouds and wind, and looking over onto the water's sparkling cold and black chop.

And he thought about the crew he would be racing with soon – the owner's son had his name on many Junior trophies at their club – the child eclipsing the father happens so often – usually since the father didn't sail as a kid. And Ransom's son's gang was part of MF's crew. He knew them as an elite sailing clique at Port Yacht Club – Doug's step-sister and her boyfriend.

Hussey put down his empty glass and left. The dregs - delicious - had been thick with cayenne pepper and horseradish. He walked onto the lawn. He was dressed warmly in a one piece white Henry Lloyd with "Moveable Feast" and the sail numbers "US 13" monogrammed over the heart. Ransom had left two in the van for them. He was happy to see that Ransom liked a smart looking crew – cheap owners weren't high on his “what makes a good owner” list. His deal to crew for Ransom was a polite fellow club member's gentleman's agreement – just expenses – but Frank always liked racing crew swag: hats, crew vests.

Hussey did enjoy picturing how eight crew - identically dressed crew - perhaps up to a dozen - looked during a race: a line of them sitting on the rail on the high side; one

bending over a winch trimming the genoa; another, sitting center cockpit, at the main; and the helmsman standing on the high-side at the wheel, feet braced against the heeling and banging as a racer beat up into the wind.

But the picture was interrupted by Devin's yell as he ran up the ramp from the dock toward him. "Dad, they're coming around the point. They're near Can 3".

"I see them Dev. We've only got two hours 'till the race starts. I'll move the van. You help them tie up.". Devin started to run, " help them tie up," left to the wind. Dev was already skipping past people loading other boats, down towards the end of the dock where MF had room to tie-up.

So Hussey started back along the walk to the turn-around still looking in wonderment at Devin as his baseball cap flew off - a fresh breeze caught it. "Damn... " , and he had spent fourteen dollars last night getting that hat for him. The visor opened to look like shark jaws. But Hussey didn't yell after him. He just looked on in wonderment.

Ransom guided Moveable Feast confidently into the channel towards the last marker. Hussey didn't wait to watch him maneuver. Approaching a dock in a breeze can be demanding. Charles Ransom was sure at his helm and Hussey had his job to do - closing up the U-Haul. They would leave it in the club lot for pickup.

"Let's move it, Frank" , he smiled to himself, "we race today!" As he started the van Hussey saw the boat tying up at the far end of the dock. He thought he could see Doug Ransom wave from the bow and he waved towards the boat and pulled away from the curb.

Dougie. Doug Ransom was Charles's twenty-five year old son from his first marriage. A lean athlete, half a head shorter than Hussey's' six feet, Doug was the racing edge of their crew, their, "hotdog". At age 25, he had 10 years of top level racing experience.

Sitting on the rail during a Saturday round-the buoys race, his sailing buds would describe Dougie to a new crew member, in low voice to avoid reproach from Captain Ransom for not concentrating, remarking that many of us raced dinghies as kids at Larchmont Junior Race Week but Dougie took honors. And he almost raced Lightnings at the Seoul Olympics – his claim to fame. And "470's" all through Dartmouth. And he – but....

Charles, always the Captain, would yell from the wheel for the rail to look down the course. "Chatter, chatter!... Where's the wind? Damnit!", or some remark that implied the crew ate more than they were worth. "Yes, Dougie was hot", they would continue in a whisper, "and a gentleman to boot".

And so, Hussey walked back from the locked van to join Dougie and his step-mother, Kari and Kari's daughter, Dawn, at the cache of sails. Devin brought the crew from Moveable Feast. "Mr. Hussey, hello. " Dawn gave him a hug. She looked like a swimmer - half a head taller than Kari. And Hussey got a big kiss from Kari, his arm

around Doug's thin shoulders. "Frank love", Kari said. She was beaming - health, golden hair, sun browned skin.

"Are you off for the summer?" She and Charles had just finished the winter southern racing circuit. Charles, an economist at the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies, had taken a sabbatical. For three months now, they had been campaigning Moveable Feast in the warm waters of the Caribbean. Excitement, bubbling chatter and great expectations.... Milling crews gathered all around on the large lawn in front of the Club. On the docks, boats were being loaded. Quick smiles and hellos to acquaintances from other crews.

"So, Doug, how's your thesis defense?", Hussey asked, having already heard he had an easy time of it. Doug Ransom was just finishing grad school in economics; and following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps, he expected to join the family consulting firm.

Devin cut in on his dad to talk to Dougie - one of his heros. "Where's Dudley, Bob?"

Dougie looked at Devin, smiled saying, "Dudley's here. Bob flew back after Antigua."

Dougie was Devin's first sailing instructor. In the Port YC summer program there might be ten instructors for a hundred children. Usually one instructor would rise to hero or "Dad" status. At the lunch breaks, the teens would be hanging out on the lawn being "teens" but out on the dock another ritual would be taking place. At the end of the fixed dock was the "Tea House" - a large open gazebo-like wood structure. Ramps with varnished railings lead from the Tea House to three floating docks. Here, during lunches, the hero would hold court. He would tell "war-stories"; perhaps about the women in his life. Dougie might talk about some important race; how an anticipated wind shift made up for a bad start. The younger kids would vie for his attention. On a hot day he might throw a few of them in.

"Gotta Move" is here and so is "Revenge" , " Devin reported "Yes, they'll be breathing down our necks", Dougie said to Devin. "But we'll pull away from both of them if the last leg up the Jersey coast is a beat. " Over the breeze and bustle Dev didn't quite hear, but he nodded and grinned anyway.

They loaded themselves up with the sail bags and supplies and started down to the boat. Frank lifted a bag with a spinnaker – about 30 pounds but the main took 2 people to carry it aboard. The mast was 6 stories tall – lots of sail area.

With Kari walking so close to him he was inspired. At 50, he was still in good shape. Physically, Frank Hussey was not the average weekend yachtsman. He had gone to Philadelphia Friends and then Penn like his dad. At Friends and then at Penn he ran steeplechase. Then he didn't go to Yale Law like dad. After an Ivy education, he moved

to New York City and became a cop: a lieutenant at twenty-four and then before he was thirty a captain. He was a smart detective, solved more than his share of crimes and made those around him look good. Representing the Department he ran the marathon five times. Broke three hours every time except the last. That was a long time ago. When he stopped running, he went to grad school part-time; studied math/education at Columbia; was Doctor Hussey before he retired on disability from the force at forty-two.

Kari put her arm through Frank's as they walked. "So how was the trip down?"

He really didn't know the Ransoms well: in the same club - but first time racing together - but he could get into the swing – he pretended to try to bite her ear – and laughed as they tottered down the ramp. "Yes, the ride down was easy once we were out of the City – we left late To avoid rush hour. I have the “boy” for the weekend. I think he'll be mine sailing for most of the summer.”

Kari looked forward to their month crewing together. She knew him from the bar at the Club but Hussey had never crewed for Charles. She didn't know why Charles had recruited him for the Columbus 500 Race – certainly not a foredeck hand or a young winch-grinder. And wasn't Dougie gonna be the other watch captain?

“Where did you guys keep the boat last night? We were looking for you”. "Charles dropped the hook in Eastern Bay," she said. "So, so tired from the slog up from Norfolk and he wanted us to be fresh for the race. Had a cassole navarone and a great bottle of "Lunch Bags" '78."

Hussey caught her private pronunciation of a top Bordeaux - Lynch Bages – it's gonna be a good crew.

He mimicked her menu. "Oh, juste un zimple cassole navarone." Once a cop...

Kari cooked perhaps 5 different dishes over the dozen years she was married to Charles. Good and easy was Kari's way. She still had some of the case of Lynch Bages brought back after the '82 Bermuda Race? They always filled up the forward cabin with duty free, in bond booze after Bermuda races. Almost enough reason to go.

"That was the last of the best - a toast to younger days." And Kari gave Hussey a private pat on the butt that almost had him lose his sail over the railing of the steep ramp. They stepped aboard MF with their packages and sails.

Charles stuck his head and shoulders up through the open cockpit hatch. "Frank, it's good to see you. And Devin - big day today.... Hellos all around. So, everybody's fine? Let's get the show on the road. " He smiled up at Hussey with a rye grin; heartily took Hussey's offered paw in his own thinner hand.

The sun was warmer. Race day and two hours to the gun. Charles turned away, shielded his eyes and inventoried the crew and the deck. "We're all here unless Dougie wants to jump ship here.... Frank, can you take over? And take us out." Frank nodded to Charles and shouted to them, "Stow the gear. Chop, chop amigos - let's get off this dock!.... Dev get on the dock and handle the bow line."

Ransom stepped back down the hatch further into the dark boat to his charts and back to his seat at the nav table. Doug made eye contact with Hussey and mouthed a whisper, "I might jump ship in New York." Hussey thought "here we go, father and son crap".

Hussey didn't know them well enough to comment. He just nodded and nodded a "sorry" as Douglas walked forward to handle the bow line. Hussey stepped behind the wheel and checked the throttle and gear levers. MF was in neutral with the diesel putt-putting. "Excuse me." Hussey gestured to a couple on the dock near the stern. "I got you", the guy yelled, understanding the implied request for help in casting off. They bent over the stern dock cleat and started to untie the stern line.

"Hold on", Hussey yelled – but he didn't have to. He could see the couple on the dock at the stern had just unraveled the dock line from the cleat. He yelled forward to Dev on the dock. "OK, cast off the bow," Hussey yelled from the wheel. He really couldn't be heard forward with the din from the pre-race activity and with Dawn standing amidships chattering with kids on the dock but Dougie, looking back from the bow made the signal with palms up, the signal for "Well, are you ready?". Hussey nodded and Dougie had the bow line cast off. The breeze from the shore, from the north-west, pushed the bow slowly away from the dock. Moveable Feast pivoted towards the channel with the stern still tight. Hussey said "OK" to his guy on the dock. Hussey smiled and yelled thanks as they untied the stern line and threw it into the cockpit.

Hussey put Moveable Feast into forward and headed her into the channel.