Self-Rescue

Anatomy & critique of a capsize recovery

FLASH!! Beware!!!
To our distress, my crew, Shannon, and I discovered in early June 2019 at the Warm Water regatta that if your fore and/or aft buoyancy compartment is flooded, even the cure-all Rest & Relaxation (R&R) position [p. 42(b)] becomes useless. Yes. Flooded buoyancy makes the relaxed self-rescue described on pp.56-57 impossible. **Please!** Make well tested buoyancy your pre-launch priority #1 in all conditions.

Sunday 2 June 2013, Detroit River off the Bayview YC: (photos: Photoelement, Martin Chumiecki) Mark Taylor and his brother, Paul (W7673) have just capsized. Spinnaker was involved. Under the Racing Rules of Sailing and Law of the Sea, Robert and Nikos in W3445 have an overriding duty to try to help - if it appears that help may be needed.

RRS #1: SAFETY
1.1 Helping Those in Danger
A boat or competitor shall give all possible help to any person or vessel in danger.

Robert reacted perfectly: I thought of the rule but felt we would only add to the problem at that point. The rescue boat was out and the photo boat was there. I did change course to come close and check out how they were doing. *Robert*

Left: Crew Paul has done job one flawlessly: He is on the fully lowered centreboard. As usual on a spinnaker run, the helm was sitting to leeward - and in a way, still is. At this point, Paul and Mark are placed perfectly to try the ***scoop method*** by having Mark stay where he is while Paul uses his weight on the centreboard to lever the boat back upright. This method offers several advantages:

1. The inside person is well placed to ensure that sheets are free to run so that sails do not scoop up water that can easily defeat the best righting efforts of the crew on the centreboard.
2. As the boat begins to come back up, the inboard person can further help the process by moving some of his/her weight over towards the high side of the boat.
3. Above all, somebody will be inside the boat already as it rights, ready to immediately get the centreboard fully up, keep the sails free to luff and to help the other crew member back aboard!

(above) Last I looked, some learn-to-sail programmes are still telling their students to send the crew to hold the bow head to wind as the other person rights the boat and gets back aboard. In my opinion, this is worse than useless because it makes the crew waste valuable energy swimming which could be a killer in frigid water. Instead, the boat should be left/kept sideways to the wind - preferably with the mast aimed downwind - as the boat is righted.

Another of my objections to righting with the boat held head to wind, is that sooner or later the holder will have to let go to get back into the boat. Unless the holder waits until the boat is bailed, there is the very real risk that the boat will start making sternway while still full of water. That is a re-capsize waiting to happen. In my regrettably extensive capsize experience at home and abroad, I have never had such a problem with the "abeam to the wind" method.

Alas, Mark *(above)* goes for the traditional approach and swims to grab the bow. Note that if Mark had stayed inside the hull, there is the distinct possibility that Paul would have righted the boat by now - with Mark inside it. In fact, as you can see above, Paul is righting the boat nicely with just his own weight. So Mark could have stayed inside the boat where he started and now be making sure that the sails are not making Paul lift unnecessary water during the righting process. Then that jib, too, *(above)* could perhaps be left freer to shed water!

And now Paul is about to make *his* life tougher than it needs to be: Having foregone the scoop method, Paul should at least make sure he drags himself aboard as the boat comes upright. I do this by flopping into the boat as soon as the righting motion passes the point of no return. Better too soon than too late. Once or twice I have moved too soon but that costs little: I merely get back onto the board and try again. Failure to get in while one can easily do so leads to needless effort having to be expended - or worse - on a sometimes well nigh impossible effort to climb in from the water.

Here we see what happens if someone is not in the boat as soon as it rights. At my age (74) I now find it hard to climb aboard without some kind of help, especially with a bulky PFD on. That's why I like to get back in off the centreboard. Failing that, I need someone to heel the boat towards me until the rubrail is immersed and I can just slide aboard.

Note that as long as **the sails are luffing and the boat is not moving through the water,** it is safe to heel a Wayfarer until the rubrail is immersed. Even worse than reboarding after a capsize is, as I discovered last summer, trying to climb back aboard a "high and dry" boat after falling overboard. I now keep a tie-on stirrup handy.

Many sailors prefer to get back aboard over the transom - especially when no one else is back aboard yet. Here you can see Mark *(right)* trying to keep the boat level as young Paul works to get back aboard. It would be quite safe to heel the boat to either gunwale without risk of a capsize while the boat is dead in the water. Here, the boat should be allowed to heel towards Paul until he can easily slide aboard while Mark hangs onto the port side to guard too much heel. A further problem with both crew members being in the water at the stern as shown, is that this tends to let the boat bear off and insist on sailing away. And it is well nigh impossible to keep a water filled boat that has begun to move through the water from re-capsizing, and twice as tough to do so from the position in the water that Mark and Paul are in. Luckily, the lads are young and strong and easily up to the challenge Mark *(r)* will act as ballast, while Paul climbs back in. But the scoop method would have been **so much easier**.

Now Paul is back aboard but Mark is acting as a sea anchor that will keep the bow pointed downwind and the boat sailing. Regardless, the **absolute first thing** that should happen after the boat is righted and somebody is back aboard, is that the **board should be fully raised**. Note how W7673 is already starting to sail away with Mark making a wake and Paul looking suitably nervous. Here, I would dive for the board and bring it fully up. The person in the water should move as quickly as possible to a spot about half-way along the windward topside, near the thwart. Taking Mark's drag off the transom, letting the sails luff and keeping the board up will then let the boat stabilize itself beam-on to the wind and dead in the water while reducing the **capsize risk** to zero. With the boat in that state, the person inside can, as noted earlier, safely heel the boat to windward - even 'til the rubrail is immersed - and help his mate back aboard.

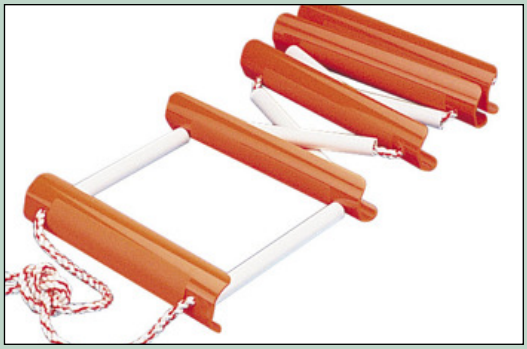
Here you can just see our fully raised board.

Beer break time!!
Tony Krauss and Uncle Al relax after a wake-up capsize to start their 2013 Midwinters. With sails luffing and board up , the boat is stable beam-on to the wind.

(above) Now the boat looks after itself. On the previous page *(bottom)* you can also (sort of) see that our centreboard is completely raised. Having the board full up, has the huge, additional plus of plugging most of the centreboard box against incoming water. This tends to cut bailing effort in half especially if you don't have slot closure strips. Frank Goulay and I capsized in six-foot chop off the Isle of Wight and Frank had that boat dry quick as a wink once the board was up. Tony starts to bail as Uncle Al looks on. Boat stabilized with board full up and my lovely new sails flogging wildly. I can see no reason why next time I can't cautiously heave to. That would let me enjoy my beer in true peace. Sooner or later of course, the fun will have to be curtailed and bailing will have to start. Luckily I have a heart condition and can, in reasonably good conscience, ask my crew to bail. Above, I have already done my bit by offering to open Tony Krauss's beer for him

A self-rescue of a different colour ...

(below).On the last day of our 2014 Chesapeake Cruise, a surprise gybe knocked me overboard as we were leaving Deal Island. It was a benign summer's day and the water was warm. But there was a sobering component to the experience as I discovered that I am now too old/ weak to pull myself back into a boat that has not been lowered by means of a capsize. My sailing partner, even older than I, was unable to help me climb back aboard, either. Luckily, a nice sandy shore was only 50 yards away. So we sailed in after a fashion until I could stand and climb back aboard.



A few days later, my thoughtful wife got me a sea-dog folding boarding ladder *(left)* and a stirrup as well. The latter can also be improvised by tying a bowline into handy bits of rope which could in fact live permanently tied around the deck end of each shroud while one is out sailing. I plan to try this out in warm water near shore at my earliest opportunity.

2013 BOD Regatta: Nick Seraphinoff keeps the boat from inverting on the Detroit River off Bayview YC as Chip untangles the spinnaker.