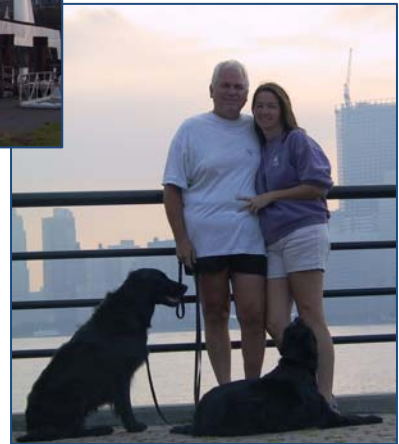
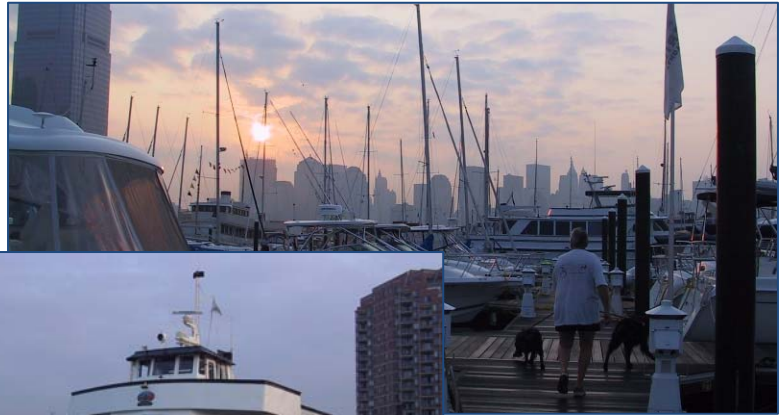


The time had come to “turn left...” Charis was headed up the East River and through the infamous Hell Gate... and on to Long Island Sound!



Hell Gate is a narrow channel at the top of the East River, with a reputation for being difficult to transit, due to strong converging tide-driven currents and heavy commercial traffic. Its original name *Hellegat* came from a Dutch explorer in the 1600's. Back then, many submerged rocks added to the complexity of a safe passage, but these have long since been blasted away by the Army Corps of Engineers. Our plan was to arrive at this point just in time to ride the favorable tail end of flood tide.

This meant leaving Liberty Landing Marina at “8 bells” ( 8 AM sharp, for those unfamiliar with the rhythm of a ship's clock). But first, traveling with 4-legged crewmembers means a morning walk before we leave. There is a large park adjacent to the marina, which was pretty much deserted at that hour of the morning, and afforded an unobstructed view of the sun rising over the city across the Hudson River.

We had thought that passing through Hell Gate would be the big excitement for the day, but it turned out that getting to the East River was by far the greater challenge. The Statue of Liberty ferries come in to refuel each morning at Liberty Landing Marina... the very same service dock where we needed to stop for a desperately overdue pump-out! Hectic, to say the least, and another test of our docking skills, not to mention our trust in the ability of unknown dock crew to properly handle our docking lines.



Next came the crossing of New York Harbor – during peak Friday morning rush hour traffic. Heavy chop and ever heavier VHF radio traffic between ferry captains: routine greetings, announcements regarding their movements, and indulgent complaints concerning “slow moving nuisance traffic” – which turned out to be a couple of pleasure craft (sailboats) headed for the East River... that was us!

Once past all the traffic, the chop subsided and things calmed down, allowing us to focus on the sights along the East River: the Staten Island Ferry Terminal, tall ships at the South Street Seaport, the United Nations complex, and bridge after bridge after bridge..., ...each one just a little different than the one before.



Then came Hell Gate.

We timed the tides perfectly, the current was negligible, and the "one little barge & tug" we met up with hardly bothered us at all.

What was all the fuss about?



A few more bridges, a few more barges... passing directly under one of the active runways into LaGuardia on a Friday morning was exciting...



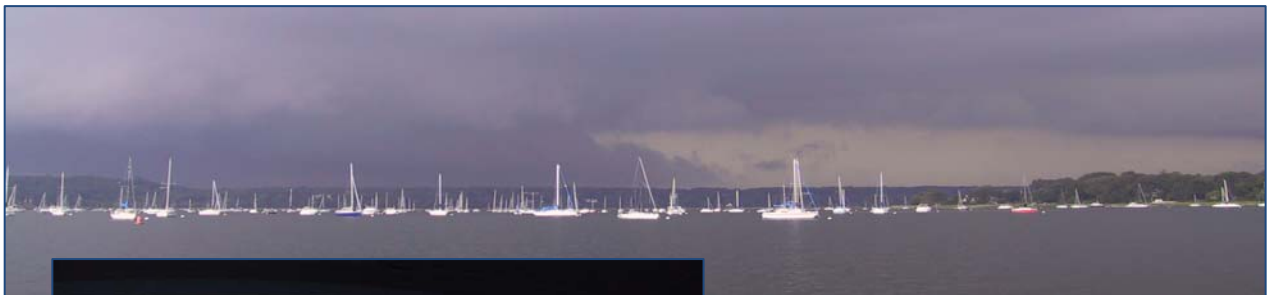
... one last bridge and we were in the Sound.

We quickly noticed that some things were different here... no more bridges, and the pleasure yachts – and their dinghies – got a lot bigger...



... yes, that's a motor yacht towing its "dinghy": a 25-foot center console sport boat. Some dinghy!

What wasn't different was the weather. The clouds had been threatening all day... and yet another storm was predicted for early evening, so we ducked into the first peaceful harbor we could find, which turned out to be Oyster Bay, on the northern shore of Long Island.



Again, our timing was good – we had just enough time to run the dogs ashore and get back to the boat before this storm bank arrived. Hard to describe the color green of these clouds – and this was about 5 PM.

Saturday brought brilliant blue skies and we decided to stretch our legs and explore the town. Oyster Bay was the summer home of Theodore Roosevelt, and the town was filled with historical references from that era. There's also a waterfront park with the restored Nantucket lightship.



Here's Bruce and one of the crew plotting the course for the following day.



Sunday was a momentous occasion for us on two counts, another beautiful day and we actually *sailed* the boat... for the first time since leaving Lake Champlain we were not on a schedule and were not being chased by storms.

We spent a restful night in a slip at the Brewers Yard in Branford, CT, on the north shore of the sound, and splurged on a big breakfast in the cockpit the next morning before heading on our way eastbound.



Another lovely afternoon sail brought us to the breakwater guarded by the twin lighthouses at Old Saybrook, CT, headed up the Connecticut River to our destination for the night: a mooring at Old Lyme Marina.



But first we had to pass through the Old Lyme drawbridge that carries the Amtrak rail line. According to the cruising guide, the bridge is “normally open” and only closes when rail traffic approaches, with “rarely a lengthy closing...” We hit one of those rare lengthy closings, waiting 45 minutes for the next



opening. We did get to enjoy a beautiful sunset while we circled in the bay waiting for the bridge, but by the time we got through, and under the Rte 95 highway bridge behind it, the sun was down and the full moon was rising as we settled on our mooring for the night.

The next day brought us to familiar territory, past the lighthouse at Groton Long Point, up the Mystic River to the Mystic Shipyard. We bought and sailed our previous Hunter here over ten years before, and were delighted to return.



This chapter ends with a visit with good friends Bob & Judy Chase, our mooring neighbors from Lake Champlain, who by happy coincidence were visiting in the area.



To be continued... The crew of s/v Charis: Pam & Bruce..., and Shadow & Shelby