



WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

by Ben Stein, BWI President

I live in Southwest Florida in Fort Myers. My family and I found ourselves developing some roots in this community in a non-traditional manner. You see, we'd been living aboard and travelling on our boat for about 20 months when we arrived in Fort Myers. We planned to stay for six weeks before continuing our travels. Three and a half years later, we were still here when Hurricane Ian came through and destroyed the marina that had become our home port and sunk our boat.

It's now been almost one and a half years since Ian struck. The signs of Ian's devastation are a little less obvious, though still visible if you look and our life has found a new normal. We don't live aboard a boat anymore but we're actively shopping to find a new boat to at least weekend on and do some traveling aboard.

However, we do have our trusty 22-foot center console. Fortunately, that boat was in a building during Ian and left undamaged. For the first year after the storm, it mostly provided a platform from which we surveyed the damage and marveled at the strength of mother nature's wrath. For almost a year, our waters contained high levels of bacteria and pollutants from the storm. Experts advised against swimming and we listened.

This spring, the waters of the gulf near Sanibel and Captiva islands have returned to their normal color and there are signs of progress and rebuilding. Last weekend, for the first time since Ian, we took friends out on the water, dropped the anchor, and swam in our beautiful home waters. Dolphin played just feet from us and the pelicans put on the show that I find so captivating.

As we returned from a nearly perfect day on the water, sun-kissed and a little sticky from the saltwater, I was reminded of the magical days a boat unlocks.

I can sometimes lose perspective on how fortunate I am to make my living in this industry. I get grumpy at boat shows dodging those leisurely browsing or gawking. But, between a few glorious days on the water and the excitement of shopping for a new to me boat, I'm reminded of why I got into this industry and the experiences it enables.

I hope we can all take a moment, especially as boat show season winds down, to remind ourselves why we are drawn to the water. After a few too many recent reminders of the power of water, I know I'm relishing the reminders of the beauty and relaxation it affords.

Inside this issue:

Page 02

Writer's Tip by Lenny Rudow

Page 03

General News
Member News

INTELLIGENT DESIGN?

First I would like to thank Ben Stein, our new BWI President and Fearless Leader, for sending me an email asking for this column when I had just returned from West Marine with scrapers, rollers, and a can of bottom paint. As experienced boaters know, any news is good news when it gives you an excuse to lay the bottom-painting gear aside for another day.



Painting the bottom of a boat is, in my humble opinion, about as unpleasant a boating chore as there is. It's one of the few must-do tasks that I deplore, delay, and whenever possible dodge. When I do bite the bullet and launch a bottom-painting adventure I know I'll likely end up with black-streaked hands (because I forgot the nitrile gloves), choppy lines (because I forgot to pull the tape quickly enough) or tracking paint into the house (because I forgot to check the bottom of my shoes before going inside). And when I make blunders like these, I'm reminded that I've made them before. That I'm relearning lessons from many years ago, forgotten over the seasons.

When you don't spend enough time in the trenches you forget what it's like.

For years we boating writers have contended with job-killing copy-mills that put out thousands of words for pennies apiece, though after using these for a while most outlets realize that the quality of the content they produce is atrocious. It's written by people who don't know the first thing about recreational powerboats nor boating in America, and they can't get much past "the pointy end is the bow" before getting something wrong.

Now, everyone's playing with AI. We have to expect that soon it will be a competitor, too. But we hands-on mariners still have our edge. We know boats and boating in the real world. We can differentiate between the copious junk on Google and the accurate intel. Our time spent in the trenches pulling lower units, changing oil, rewiring switch panels, and scraping boat bottoms simply can't be matched by scraping the internet. Those "competitors" will never be as good as us at creating accurate, educational, and entertaining articles, because we can base them on real-world experience.

That, I think, is our ace in the hole when it comes to the advent of AI and our economic survival as writers. I've had more than one client come to me to "fix" the awful work done by copy mills, and I fully expect that one day someone will ask me, or maybe ask you, to "fix" the garbage spit out by a computo-brain then plastered all over a website by some naive non-boating content coordinator.

Spend your time in the trenches. Revel in your maintenance chores. Get out on the water as much as possible. Every second you spend with a boat is invaluable professional development. And it's something that AI can't match — at least not yet.

So, Ben, I'm afraid this column has to wait. I'm putting on my scruffy jeans and attacking that boat bottom, and I'm doing it today. You might not get this piece quite as quickly as we both would have liked, but I already have my scrapers, paint, and tape ready to go. Now, what am I forgetting? Chances are I'll be writing about just that in the not-too-distant future.

Lenny Rudow is a BWI past president and Angler in Chief of FishTalk Magazine.

GENERAL NEWS

ADVERTISING OFFERED IN 2024 BWI ANNUAL DIRECTORY

It's that time again when we will be creating the BWI Annual Directory which will be distributed this summer. And once again, BWI will be accepting advertising in a special section to highlight our Supporting Member businesses. The digital directory is distributed to all current Active and Supporting members. Prices are \$300 for a 4-color, full page ad in the front section. Please contact executive director, Zuzana Prochazka at info@bwi.org to place an ad or with questions.

MEMBER NEWS

ABYC AND USCG HOST FREE RISK MITIGATION WEBINAR

ABYC has unveiled the comprehensive agenda for its sixth Marine Law Symposium, scheduled for February 29, 2024. This event, available in-person in Annapolis or online, offers a hybrid participation format. Contact Sharon Aronson for complimentary registration for press. saronson@abycinc.org.



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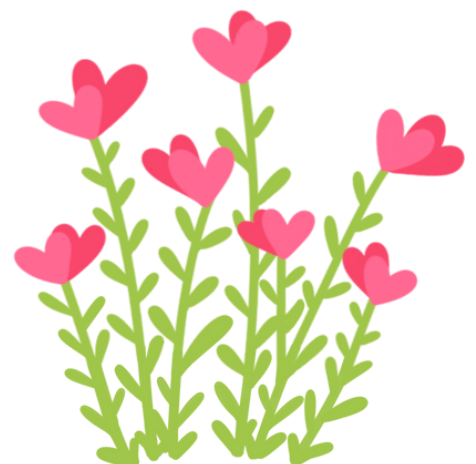
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