

PAYC member Steve Romeis completes the 2017 -TEXAS 200.



Made in the shade on day one, before the wind was too strong for the umbrella.



Chilling at the tiller. Photo by Joe Seymour, taken with my camera.



and I congratulate each other a! Photo taken by someone on beach using my camera.

So what is the Texas 200?

To start, I'll use this simple description, found on the Texas 200 website, written by *Andy Linn*:

- *A "rolling messabout" where people bring boats of all shapes and sizes and sail them on the south Texas coast.*
- * A moving, exhausting, endurance test of boat, captain, and crew.*
- * A chance to see areas of America rarely visited by man.*
- * An exercise in planning, preparation, and problem solving.*
- * A chance to make new friends and meet legends of the small boat world."*

To me, it is all that and more. It was a goal, an adventure, and quite frankly a spiritual experience that I'm thankful I had the opportunity to participate in, and will be forever grateful to my friend Joe Seymour for helping to make it happen for me.

This is my story.

Mast, I see some mast. Through the midday sun, shining on the water, I could see the mast of several boats lining the shore of Magnolia Beach, Texas. The finish line was in sight and we were about to put an exclamation mark on a dream and goal I've had for over a year and a half. As we sailed closer, I could see my new friend Gordo, who had arrived ahead of us, waving his arms and pointing to an area where 4 other Mayfly boats had left us a spot. There was plenty of room along the beach where we could have come ashore, but Gordo wanted us to be in the group of Mayfly's that had sailed this year so we could get a picture together.

It was Friday, June 16th and I was at the tiller of a *Mayfly 16*, named *Palmetto Joy*, as we completed the journey that had started 5 days earlier and some 200 miles south in Port Mansfield, Texas.

I was high on life and enjoying every second of this trip that almost didn't happen, again

You see, on June 8th, only 9 days prior to reaching the finish on Magnolia Beach, I was sitting at home feeling down about the fact that things had taken a sudden and unexpected change, and for the second year in a row, I would be missing out on the Texas 200.

Two days earlier (June 6th) I had drove all the way to Magnolia Beach. There I met the person who had sought me out to be crew for this year's 200. Apparently he had a change of heart and pulled out of the event without saying a word to me. I spent two fun days in Magnolia Beach with another new friend and master boat builder Charlie Jones. Seeing things were just not going to work out, I said so long to Charlie and drove home. It was 1:30 in the morning on Thursday, June 8th, when I made it to my house. With only 4 days until the start, I was washing my hands of it all and thought, "Maybe next year." Little did I know that because one door had closed and it seemed like it wasn't to be my year again, it in fact would soon turn out to be the best thing that could have happened.

I got a little sleep and then enjoyed a great day with my wife and grandson, jet skiing at Boom Town, near Vidor, Texas. I was at peace with the fact that I'd be sitting home while so many others were on a sailing adventure that I had planned to do for so long.

Ok, so the *peaceful easy feeling* only lasted for a while. I wanted to do this thing. Also, I knew I would drive my wife nuts day and night over the next week (and for months to come) as I cried and complained about how I should be there. My agony of missing the trip would also be amplified each time I saw a post, picture, etc., of those actually sailing. With that in mind I thought I'd reach out to one of the main guys, who was also a board member of the 200 sailing club. I very nicely explained my plans had fallen through and if he heard or knew of any last minute crew being needed, I was packed and ready to go wherever necessary. It was Thursday evening on the 8th and people really needed to be at the start point by June 10th. I really didn't think I would get any response so late in the game.

How could I have known a guy named Joe Seymour, whom I'd never heard of, was planning on doing the event solo, but really wanted someone to sail with him? Plus he was getting some serious stink eye looks from his wife Denise, who really, and I mean REALLY, wanted him to have someone to sail with him. But where would he find someone, preferably with experience and ready to go on a moment's notice. Joe saw my post and sent me a message within a few hours after I reached out that Thursday evening. I had gone to sleep and didn't see it until the next morning (Friday, June 9th). Along with Joe's message to me, I also got a another message from one of the leaders of the 200 club assuring me that Joe was a standup guy, along with his personal endorsement that he himself would spend a week on a small boat with Joe anytime. I was feeling pretty good about my "second chance" opportunity but still cautious. Of course Joe didn't know me either, and his wife was cautioning him about just picking up some guy that had been left hanging by someone else, for reasons unknown to them. They decided to play private investigator (not knowing anyone who could personally vouch for me) and checked me out on Facebook. Joe quickly came across a video of me, playing my guitar and singing a song I often

do on Mother's Day. As soon as his wife listened to the song and heard the words, she immediately turned to Joe and said, "You call him, you call him right now!"

At the same time, 200 miles away, I was wondering if I should sign on with a guy that I've never met. My recent experience had left some doubt in my mind and even though another guy had endorsed Joe, I really didn't know the guy who gave the endorsement. I had a moment of revelation and it hit me right in the heart. The guy's name was Joe. That sealed it for me. Why? Joe was also the name of my brother in law that had passed away last year after a battle with ALS, (also known as Lou Gehrig's disease). He was a very special person in my life and my family's lives, and my younger sister's husband for nearly 40 years. I got this overwhelming feeling that I had my confirmation. Also, I had a hat that had belonged to my brother in law. Of all the hats my sister gave me after he passed away, this one was special and I actually couldn't even bring myself to wear it. There are lots of emotions attached to this simple piece of material that I can't fully explain. I had made a kind of deal with myself that I would not wear this hat until I completed my first Texas 200. My plans to sail the 200 in 2016 fell through when two very troublesome hernias forced me to have surgery just prior to the event.

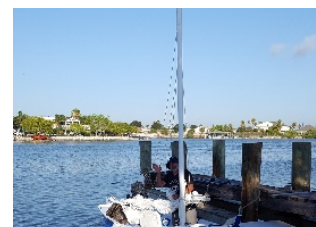
Now that Joe Seymour and his wife Denise had their confirmation and were happy with me, and I was feeling confident about him, we discussed a plan over the phone. I had that *Peaceful easy Feeling* again and really felt like this was a match made in Heaven. I got in my truck and drove to Joe's house in Burton, Texas, arriving around 11 p.m. that Friday, the 9th of June. I was greeted by the couple and felt instantly that I was exactly where I was supposed to be. They had a room waiting for me in their home and after staying up way too late visiting, we all went to sleep. Actually I didn't fall asleep easily because I was too excited. It was going to happen. It was really going to happen.

The next morning (Saturday June 10th) we loaded up the boat. I sent a text with a picture of the



boat to Lisa and she quickly replied with a comment that simply said, "**Looks pretty small, hope you enjoy the ride.**" Personally, I was amazed at the storage space of this boat. It was not just another pretty boat, it was solidly built, practical and had plenty of room for all our gear. Soon we were on our way to Port Mansfield, the starting point for this year's Texas 200. Joe built Palmetto Joy in his garage and had just completed it the previous month. It was his first attempt at boat building. I was impressed to say the least. I wouldn't advise anyone to jump on a newly built boat, that had only been sailed maybe 3 times in relatively easy lake conditions, and take it on the Texas 200, but I had that *Peaceful, Easy Feeling* and I knew Palmetto Joy wouldn't let us down.

It was a long drive but well before sunset we had the boat set up, launched and in her slip. After a nice dinner at the Pelican Bar and Grill, some good conversation with a few other 200 sailors, who were coming in and gathering at various places, we retired to our hotel for some rest.



It was a good thing we ate when we did, because shortly after we finished our meal, one of the other boats (whose real name and boat I'll leave out) caused a bit of a problem. They managed to knock out the electricity in part of the town when their mast came in contact with a power line as they backed toward the boat ramp. The good news, make that Great News, is that no one was killed. The bad news is, a lot of people waited a long time to get food that evening with no air conditioning, etc. From that point on the boater responsible was nicknamed "Sparky" for obvious reasons.



Dirk Uys, giving the Texas 200 sermon at the skippers meeting. The deer stopped to listen.

Sunday June 11th. We attended the mandatory Skippers meeting at 7 a.m. There were a lot of people there, and I was a little surprised by how many (like myself) had never sailed



this event before. There were also many who were veterans with multiple 200 completions and partial completions. I was also amazed at how many wild deer were wandering around close enough to touch, along with a big turkey and some really big jack rabbits.

I felt honored to stand with and meet some pretty legendary sailors and boat builders.

We were given all the rules and particulars. Basically I can sum it up like this:

1. You could die.
2. Whether you live or die, you are on your own.
3. The Texas 200 club is not responsible for what happens to you or anyone else.

That was simple enough for me, and we all signed a waiver stating that we understood the rules and were experts at every skill required to create universes in our galaxy and beyond.

It is true that the captain is responsible for every decision of every aspect prior to the trip, during the trip and after the trip. You need to be prepared for whatever may arise out there and be able to self-rescue in case of capsize or equipment failure. There are no scheduled pull out points and every captain is responsible for figuring out how and where to get out and back to civilization if they decided for whatever reason to discontinue.

It is also true (or at least it seems by stories past and current conversations) that anyone involved would go well out of their way to help another member in need. Of course there is a lot of water along the way and not everyone takes the same route, plus you could be so far from anyone else that no one knows you need help. Even with the large number of boats leaving within a relatively short time of one another and making way to the same designated camps, it doesn't take long to get far apart and even totally out of sight at times of any other craft or human.

Immediately after the skippers meeting, my friend Joe had to make the long drive to the finish line at Magnolia Beach so the truck and trailer would be there when we arrived at the end. Once he got to Maggie Beach, and after eating some lunch, he would ride the chartered bus back to Port Mansfield, along with all the others that had to do the same thing. I was left on my own to just hang out at the hotel.

Just about the time I was contemplating a nice nap in my air conditioned room, a fellow sailor by the name of Gordo, that I had met earlier in the day, called me and asked if I wanted to go sailing on his Mayfly 16. It was also a recent build and he wanted to check some things out. At first I thought, I'm leaving in the morning to sail 200 miles over the next 5 days, why would I want to go sailing? So I said, "Well... yeah of course, sounds like fun!"

The winds were blowing and it gave me the chance to sail on the same make of boat that I was to spend the next 5 days on. Afterwards we grabbed some lunch and I was invited to join him again on a night sail that evening. I declined the night sail and opted to just chill out in the hotel. Two boats actually went out for a little night sail that evening, but only one returned without incident. The second boat got a bit disorientated and ended up against some pilings close to someone's house. The crew was safe but the boat sustained enough damage that they had to pull out of the 200. They would be one of 3 boats, out of the 63 boats that had signed up, which for one reason or another stayed home or had to go home before it even began.

Monday, June 12th. We were up early and started the walk to the boat slip, which was a mile or two from where we were staying. Remember the truck is now at the finish line 200 miles up the coast. We managed to flag down a fisherman headed for the boat ramp. He said he had no room in the truck but offered us a ride in the boat that he was towing. Score for us. A couple other sailors joined us in the trailered boat. A short time later we were underway and the dream had begun. We were soon sailing north just west of the ICW through Red Fish Bay in the Laguna Madre, and headed for the "land cut", where we would make our way to camp one.

Good winds off our starboard beam to dead downwind were to bless us all day and we arrived at camp one in the land cut that afternoon.



Camp was fun and I began to meet some of the different people and see the various boats that do this thing called the Texas



200. It was hot when we first arrived and shade was hard to come by. There was an old fish camp on this stretch of beach. When we first arrived it had a sliver of shade on one side where a couple people gathered. As the earth continued its wonderful rotation, allowing the sun to dip further towards the western horizon, the shade spot on the east side of the building grew larger, as did the number of people gathered there. Plenty of stories were told



and refreshments were enjoyed.

I was really here and not just seeing posted pictures, videos and stories from people I didn't know, but taking my own pictures. My cheeks hurt from smiling so much. In fact I was smiling with my whole body.

The wind stayed up all night bringing plenty of breeze through the screens of my tent, which made it very comfortable sleeping for me. My dome tent has screens all the way to the top. There was no need for a rain cover so I had a great view of the stars, and with little interference from land light it was the best view I'd had in a long time.

I'm a mosquito magnet. If there is one mosquito and I'm in a crowd of a thousand people, the mosquito will find me. There are no words to properly express my hatred for those blood suckers. I sailed and lived outdoors, camping in remote places, along the Texas coast, for 5 days and did not get one mosquito bite. In fact I did not see a single one of those disease carrying weapons of agony and aggravation. It could be that I'm an "expert" at protecting myself from them, as I proclaimed by signing the waiver at the Captain's meeting. Gee, I should have signed that waiver years ago. Who knew that was all it took to get rid of mosquitos?

True, I was prepared. But truer still, we were blessed with good winds and staying in the right location at camp. I would advise anyone exploring as we did to be well prepared for overwhelming masses of mosquitos. They are there and in different conditions or if one was stuck or wandered into the wrong place, life would soon become a nightmare.



Tuesday, June 13th. We broke camp, packed up and set sail. As camp one was actually in the land cut, we would be sailing in the ICW for a while this morning. It was a good sail with no commercial traffic all day long. I did see other sailboats that we either caught up with or that caught up with us. We had a double reef in the one and only sail on *Palmetto Joy*, but reached speeds of 6.2 knots that day, sailing between 4 and 6 knots all day long as we made it to *Camp 2* on North Padre

Island. One Tandem Trimaran actually sank on day two. The two guys onboard lost some important equipment, including batteries and navigation equipment plus some other items. They had a hatch that wasn't closed properly and the boat had taken on water the first day without their notice. The next day, with the boat already a bit overloaded with all their gear, more water seeped in until the boat actually went submarine. They saved the boat and got it to shore where it was disassembled. Sing with me, "The amas were connected to the akas, and the akas were connected to...well, you get the idea. Once the hull, and the two outrigger hulls were emptied, drained of water etc., the boat was then put back together and the two sailors continued the next day with what they had left of their once overloaded boat. There were several Hobie Trimarans and homebuilt trimarans sailing the 200. Some of them hung together and buddy boated along the way. The once sunken tri was able to continue exploring beyond

the ICW with the help from friends, and they made it all the way to the finish, making every camp. Those boats are fast and always left after us and arrived before us at every camp. Well, except for when they were lost or sunk.

Another incident occurred at camp 2 when a solo sailor jumped off his boat to walk it closer to shore. He jumped into the water holding a line and instantly found that it was deeper than he thought. He lost his grip and the boat got away from him. He wasn't in danger of drowning but his boat was quickly drifting away due to a 15 plus knot wind taking it away from the shore. Another boat with two people onboard happened to be sailing towards camp about that time. One of the sailors jumped out of their boat, grab a line that was adrift from the run-a-way boat, got himself on board and sailed it back to the thankful skipper, who will be forever grateful for the quick actions and skills of his boat's rescuer. If only I had recorded it all.

The wind blew hard again all night long, which was like air condition as it blew through the large screens of my tent. It actually blew hard enough to break a piece off one of my tent poles. Not to worry. I'm an expert at pretty much anything, because I signed a waiver that said so, and I have a copy to prove it.

Camp was fun and I kept having the best time. Although I'd never met any of these people before, my name was being brought up at several different camp sites and boats along the beach as the days went by. It was all thanks to the man who decided not to sail the 200 this year, and how I went from not being able to go, after making the trip to Magnolia Beach the first time to start the 200 and having to go home, to then actually finding someone to go with at the last minute. Not everyone knew the story, but enough people were to find out about it that I was able to meet some pretty cool folks out there. I'd be just walking around taking pictures and someone would look my way and say, "Hey, are you Steve?" To which I would say, "Yeaah, that would be me."



It started prior to the captains meeting, then at the captains meeting and pretty much every camp along the way throughout the event. Once I was identified, people would ask me to come over to their camp and want to hear my story. I was offered a seat, a cold drink, food, and got to share my story and with the bonus of hearing others tell theirs. Good times and lots of laughs. Even with my good fortune and meeting some great folks, it was a small number of people compared to the overall



group, but it sure was fun. I look forward to future trips and meeting more of the many people that sail such journey.



Did I mention that we had beautiful sunsets every evening?

Wednesday, June 14th.

We were up early and excited to get started. By days end we would sail more than 40 miles before reaching camp 3 at a place called Mud Island. Great south and southeast winds carried us along. Before we knew it we were at Marker 37 and the famous Snoopy's. Not all, but several boats tied up to their pier for a chance to buy some lunch and restock their coolers with ice and perhaps some other supplies. I had heard about the place but had never been there. I'm glad we took the time to make that stop. The place didn't open until 11 a.m. and we showed up at 10:25. The owner was really accommodating and invited us in. He said they would be open in a little and we could help ourselves to ice water and the restroom. I took the time to use the "indoor plumbing" and make some contact with the outside world as I had cell phone coverage for the first time since leaving Port Mansfield. I called Lisa and let her know all was going great and I was having the time of my life. Her voice cracked a little as she replied, "I'm really glad you're having fun, but I'm ready for you to come home now." Awww, she missed me. I said, "The winds are good and I'm headed that way. See ya when I get there."



I enjoyed a great hamburger at Snoopy's (made world famous by Texas 200 sailors who have stopped there before) and then picked up some extra water at the bait store across the street, while some nice person gave Joe a bag of ice to put in our cooler. We sailed away from marker 37 and before long (probably less than an hour) we were sailing across Corpus Christi Bay and loving it. We cruised through Shamrock Cove and took a short cut through Stingray Hole.

Right before entering the busy ship channel we made a beach pit stop on Mustang Island for a little swim and play time. We were one of 4 boats, buddy sailing since we left marker 37 and I'm glad whoever motioned to go ashore did so. It was a really nice beach



with pretty water and shells everywhere. We had discussed various options for our route and it was decided that we would take our chances sailing the Corpus Christi Ship Channel to the Lydia Ann

Channel. Once there, depending on time, we had a couple of options.

We sailed close hauled out the channel towards Aransas Pass without having to tack once. It was great. We watched another boat, not one of our group of 4, having to tack numerous times. It was not pretty, but only because he didn't yield right away when he should have and probably gave one Port Captain on a tanker some real concern. I nicknamed him "Sir Tack-a-Lot."

We continued on and our timing was great as we sailed through and past the multiple ferry's that cross the channel from Mustang Island to Harbor Island. It's like a game of Frogger with



Photo by Stuart Goodrich

no reset button, so it's important to do it right the first time. It really did go very well. I've read accounts of others who told horror stories of the route through Shamrock Cove and Stingray Hole. Our navigation was good, the wind stayed pretty good and the

current didn't seem to be an issue. All great planning by the captain of course and lots of help by our guardian angels.



We also managed to slip by a pirate ship without shot fired by them or us.

Perhaps I scared them off with my invisible man look.



incident or a single



We sailed on, getting some pictures of the Lydia Ann Lighthouse and then out of the channel, eventually crossing Corpus Christi Bayou and to our 3rd camp on Mud Island. What a great day of sailing and exploring.

This year was the first year that the Texas 200 offered two options for the trip. There was the "Traditional route", the one we took, and it started at Port Mansfield and ended at Magnolia Beach. This route had 4 camps along the way.

For the first time ever another option was offered called the "Hard Way". Those that chose the *hard way* would start at Magnolia Beach and also finish at Magnolia Beach. They would sail to a different camp 1 and 2 as they made their way south toward us traditional folks. We would then all meet at camp 3. From there we would all sail to camp 4 and then to the finish at Magnolia Beach. It was recommended that people who wanted to go the hard way were those who had sailed the event before. Mainly because it would be, if



the winds were blowing from the normal south and southeast, a lot of beating into the wind, therefore appropriately named, *"The hard way."*



Photo by Joe Seymour or ?

Camp three was pretty cool, but I thought that about every camp. There were more than 40 boats at camp 3. I think the count was 43. I have no idea where the other boats were.

I looked for a friend that was supposed to be there who was coming the hard way, but found out later that they had boat problems and had to go back, never being able to make any of the camps.

Another person that I wanted to meet at camp 3 was a man and his two adopted daughters from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. One daughter was 14 and the other 15. They had sailed the event before and were going the "hard way" this year. They load up their Wayfarer 15 foot sailboat on the trailer and drive the 1,500 mile trip to do the Texas 200. He was a really nice guy and his daughters were precious, intelligent young ladies with a great sense of humor. They were not only veterans of this event but have sailed on many adventures in different places, including areas of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior to mention a few. I had seen pictures of some of their adventures but learned



Photo from John Hippe' page of John, Kaitlyn or Hannah.

for the first time that daughters is blind. She hat or some other nothing, I've lost at her sister had me and a spirit of



Kaitlyn and Hannah.
Photo from John Hippe's
FB page

evening, at camp 3, that one of the laughed when someone said they lost a thing overboard. She said, "That's least 7 walking canes over the years. She and laughing. What a great family. Full of life, love exploration.

Sailing the traditional (Cathy) and daughter named *Hello Kitty*. I had last seen them at the bait store, across from Snoopy's, buying a case of beer. Yes, a case. Perhaps their women's intuition...*just a case or in case* something happened? I'm guessing they probably bought ice too. They were both very experienced sailors and Texas 200 veterans. I heard that Cathy, the mom on the team, actually got married during the Texas 200 a few years back. Cathy's husband was sailing another boat that was coming the hard way and they planned on meeting up at camp 3, along with everyone else. As night closed in on us, there was no sign or word from the two ladies on Hello Kitty. The next day, they still had not showed up. I never spoke to the husband so I don't know if anyone had information, but I was a bit concerned, even knowing they were very experienced and well equipped with the supplies I saw them pick up the previous day at marker 37. (**remember the case of beer?)



Photo by John Bratton of Cathy and Meredith and Hello Kitty.

Thursday, June 15th. We had at least 50 miles of sailing to do today, depending on the course we sailed and the wind direction, but I couldn't wait to get started. Today I was headed for a place I've wanted to go to for a very long time. Army Hole was our destination and would be camp 4. My captain, Joe, had sailed the 200 two years ago in 2015. That was his first time and only time prior to this year. At the time of his first 200 he had only been sailing 9 months. His crew was a friend who had never been on a sailboat before. Joe made a conservative and probably wise decision to keep his course simple, and they stayed in the ICW without exploring in the skinny waters and out of the way places through the bays and backwaters. This year he had me along, ☺ and I convinced him that I knew some short cuts. It didn't take much twisting of the arm to get him to explore well beyond the ICW. In fact we were only in *The Ditch* when we absolutely had to be. Even then, it was great in my opinion. Joe hadn't made it to Army Hole in 2015 because he saw another boater that had run aground and opted to spend the night with the other boater rather than leave him there alone. So this year we both had the goal of making Camp 4 – Army Hole.

After breaking camp we were off and sailing with a lot of water all around us. I was loving it, but my poor captain had lost or misplaced his glasses and was not real happy about that. The bright sun made looking at the Navionics charts on the phone screen challenging at times. I would kneel as low as I could, using my body and a boat cushion to create some shade then give directions like, "a little to port, hold that... no your other port.. oh, wait, I'm sorry I have the screen reversed, ok... straight, now go to starboard 15 degrees." It was really quite fun for me, and we would have been doing the same thing even if Joe had his glasses.

We sailed on through Aransas Bay, between the narrow cut of Pelican reef and Shell reef. Crossing Carlos Bay, Cedar Dugout, Cedar Point and on to Mesquite Bay. I would get a bearing on something and tell Joe to head towards what appeared to be the second outcropping of trees on that barrier island. And he would again, always graciously concealing his frustration, calmly say "**I can't see anything without my glasses!!!!**" To which I would huddle under a boat cushion for shade and say, "fall off, or head up, a little to port or starboard." It wasn't super important all the time, but there were times when just a few degrees really mattered. We had a great sail and I was amazed at how we glided through some spots with the rudder kicked up and the lee board all the way up in less than 18 inches of water, occasionally and unintentionally disturbing a stingray or two. It was great to be able to see them in the clear water.

We sailed on to a place called Ayres Dugout. There we saw two of our fellow 200 sailors who looked like they were taking a little break. They had actually run hard aground. Since several boats were already stopped and they just waved us on, we stayed our course.

It was made very clear at the captains meeting that a one handed wave means, "Hello" and waving with two hands means, "HELP please, I made a Boo Boo!" We found out later that the boat that had run aground was that of two very experienced sailors who made a slight navigation error at a critical time. That's the chance you take when you sail these back waters. They had been there many times before, so if it had happened to them, I knew it could happen

to anyone. The boat was unfortunately damaged enough that once they were off the reef they made the correct decision to pull out and head for home without making camp 4. I was sorry to see them go, but later inspection of the boat, once back on the trailer, confirmed they had indeed made a good call to opt out when they did.

One of the things that happened on this day while sailing through some of the large areas of water was an emotional event for me. Throughout the day, as we sailed on, my hat blew off my head 3 times at various points and we did successful *hat overboard drills* 3 times. The 4th time my hat blew off my head we failed to retrieve it after losing sight in the swells and chop. Remember that hat that is so special to me?

Oh, no.... my brother-in-laws hat went overboard? No, it was a different hat. I had been saving brother in laws hat for the finish, but was now the time? Perhaps my brother in law had been trying to get my attention and the winds that took the hat I had been wearing was his way of telling me that indeed it was time. Yes, I thought to myself, *maybe it was*. Captain Joe knew my story about the hat that had belonged to my brother in law. Even now it's very emotional to write about it. As I dug into my pack to get the hat I had carried with me, Joe suggested I tie a line to it and secure it somehow. I thought, *why didn't I think of that?* So I tied one end of the line to the hat and the other end to my life jacket. I wasn't going to lose this hat, but I was going wear it from this point on and all the way to the finish of the Texas 200!



We continued on, sailing across San Antonio Bay, through South Pass into and across Espiritu Santo Bay until we reached camp. We had made it to Army Hole! I was not disappointed, and after an incredible day of sailing and navigating our way successfully I was beyond happy and again smiling with my whole body! We got to set our tents up on nicely cut grass. And a double added bonus... Joe found his glasses! They were in his tent and had been rolled up when we packed up the previous camp. He had actually checked the tent that morning by rolling the tent back out and shaking it, but the sneaky glasses had eluded him. Finding missing or misplaced glasses while on the Texas 200 is not specifically in the wavier as something one should be an expert at, but I may recommend that be added in the future.

I got to meet some people at this camp that I hadn't meet prior. One fellow is actually from Beaumont. He had sailed the hard way and is considered a guru when it comes to building and sailing the Mayfly designed boats. It was maybe his 6th or 7th time to sail the 200. I met him after noticing he was looking at me as we set up our respective tents. I wasn't sure why he was staring at me, so I said, "Hi, how's it going?" Can you guess what happened next? He kept looking at me with a slight squint in one eye as he asked, "Are you Steve?" I smiled and said, "Why yes I am." He



then stood up and walked toward me with a big smile on his face and said, "I want to shake your hand!" I was smiling from ear to ear as we shook hands and got acquainted. He had come the hard way, yet had still somehow heard of me and *my story* about the poor guy who had been left standing at the seashore. I then learned of a few encounters he had with the man who made me famous. O.k., I wasn't famous, but I got a lot of mileage out of my story.

My only wish is that we could have stayed longer at Army Hole. My wish is to return sometime in the near future for 2 or 3 days of camping and exploring.

I wandered around well after dark, talking to different people. I didn't come close to meeting everyone, but of those I did talk to that evening, no one knew where the two missing ladies were on Hello Kitty. Someone probably had news, but all I knew is that they weren't at camp 3 yesterday and they weren't here at camp 4.

I even got a video as one lone sailor made his way in late that night. Eventually I crawled into my tent, still smiling, looking and listening as the sparkling stars and night sounds entertained me until I fell asleep.

Friday, June 16th 2017. With a shorter day of sailing than the past few, we prepared to leave Army Hole and explore some interesting routes out of here and into Matagorda Bay south of the ICW, then sail north past Port O'Connor and on to the finish line at Magnolia Beach.

We began making our way to the cut that leads out of Army Hole and after a short distance headed away from the channel to go exploring a skinny water route we had discussed the night before and again that morning.

One of our fellow boaters, in a Mayfly 14 promptly capsized and just as quickly had his boat righted and was underway again. I'm quite sure if Joe and I had capsized, things would not have gone so well. Our goal was not to get in that situation and I was glad that we accomplished that along with the other goals we discussed.

Our sail took us through the ends of Espiritu Santo Bay, into shallow waters between Grass Island and Bayucos Point. We went through Saluria Bayou along Bayucos Island, then sailed past Mud Flats and came out of Big Bayou southeast of Port O'Connor. From there it was a nice sail north to Magnolia Beach. We kept looking until we saw them... The mast along the beach.

Well you know the rest, because that's how I started this story.

After some celebrating and congratulating to those already there, and more celebrating as others arrived, we just hung out for a while sharing stories and enjoying some refreshments. Joe and I decided to get the boat back on the trailer and things ready for the road before the shrimp boil began at 4 p.m. (Being a waiver signing member of the Texas 200, I probably should say at 1600 hours, but I never heard anyone else



The Mayfly gang group picture at the finish, including honorary member Mike Mangus who was sailing a Dovekey 21. Mike was nice enough to slow down enough for us to keep up. Photo

there say it that way.) Joe can't eat shell fish due to an allergy, but I was looking forward to it. Shiner Beer is the "official beer of the Texas 200" and as one of the sponsors, supplies beer for all at the end of the event. Well, it worked out good because it turns out that Joe **is not allergic to beer**. So he enjoyed the cold beer and I enjoyed the shrimp boil, along with the corn and potatoes. All was well as I was a highly qualified designated driver, so I could take that role on the trip back to Joe's house after we left that afternoon.

I was sitting there visiting with one person or another and suddenly realized as one guy stood up that next to me now was a young lady. It was Meredith. Cathy's daughter. They were here at the finish and had been fine all along. I was really happy to see these two that I never met until 5 days earlier and had last seen loading their boat with a case of beer. I don't have the whole story, but they had some minor issues that got them behind on day 3, so they spent the night on some stretch of beach and enjoyed the evening camped out with plenty of liquid refreshments. That put them a little behind everyone else, so they just continued on making their own camps and schedule all the way to the finish. Another success story.

We had a nice trip back to Burton, Texas, where Joe's wife greeted us upon our arrival with a welcome home sign she had creatively made, and balloons! There was a little round table set out with a bucket of ice containing a beer for Joe and a bottle of water for me. What a nice greeting. She also had a supper cooked, plus had both bathrooms ready with fresh towels so we could take a much needed hot shower with plenty of soap.



They convinced me to spend the night as it got a little late and the day had been a long one that started far away at Army Hole. It didn't take much convincing because I just loved being around these two. My hope is that we will be friends for life and have more good times together in the future. Times spent exploring and enjoying days filled with new adventures and beautiful sunsets.

The next day, Saturday June 17th, I dove home to where my sweet wife was waiting for me with a smile and a kiss. I am not ashamed to admit that I had moments during the drive home when the memories of the past week swept over me and actually brought a few tears of joy to my eyes.

It was sinking in deeper and it hit me in the most wonderful way. I had finally completed this thing I wanted to do for so long. I laughed out loud, and just smiled with my whole body.



Article and pictures, by Steve Romeis

(unless noted otherwise under the picture), thanks to John Hippe and Pam LeBlanc for letting me steal a few of their pictures.

To view many other great pictures of this year's event, go to the Texas 200 facebook page. So many people have shared amazing pictures and videos. You can get a real look at the various boats that sailed this year. The Texas200.com website is full of information and has all past 200 events archived for all to see. For anyone contemplating participating and or joining the group, the website is a valuable source of information. It sure helped me be prepared as I read the stories of previous sailors who lived to tell about it. After all, veterans of the event are experts in pretty much everything and have signed a waiver to prove it.

Side notes:

**Jom Michalak is the designer of the Mayfly boat and many other boats.*

*** Chuck Leinweber of Duckworks Magazine, and owner of Duckworks Boatbuilding, started the Texas 200 in 2008. This was the 10th year.*

**** Roughly 40 percent of the boats start don't make it to the finish. As an example, last year 57 boats started and only 26 boats completed the event.*

***** This year there were 63 boats and 106 people from 14 different states, and I think one guy was from Canada, signed up to go. 60 boat actually started the event, with 40 of them sailing the *traditional route* and 20 of them going the *hard way*. Out of these 60 boats, 50 of them made it to the finish line. This may be the highest percentage of boats to ever complete the 200. The good news is that the weather really shined on us the entire trip. The bad news is, having such a successful year may lead others who may not be qualified for such an event to sign up and get in over their head.*

