

## BUTLER FAMILY MANILA BAY - SOUTH CHINA SEA TYPHOON ADVENTURE

In 1966 Bill and I bought a second-hand, 38 foot sailboat, which was originally built in England, and we named her "Siboney". In November 1967 the children had a long week-end from school, so we decided to have a family outing. Aboard "Siboney" as we sailed from Manila Yacht Club at dawn were Susan aged 12, Bill, Jr., 11, Jim 10, Bill, Sr., and myself. (Sally 5 and Joey 2 stayed at home with the maids.)

I remember that there was almost no wind, so we went wing and wing in the early morning mist down the 30 mile stretch of Manila Bay out to Corregidor and into the South China Sea.

Billy and Jimmy were our sailors. They put up and took down sails, tightened jibs, tied down hallards, pulled ropes around wenches while Bill, Sr., gave commands and handled the tiller. Susan and I went along, as usual, to cook, wash dishes, and relax.

Arriving at White Sands Beach in the South China Sea some eight hours later, we anchored "Siboney" and went ashore to swim, collect sea shells. In the evenings we sat on the boat watching spectacular Pacific sunsets while cooking steaks on a charcoal grill suspended over the stern. This tranquil, island life routine continued all day Thursday until Friday evening. We swam, collected sea shells and coral rocks from various uninhabited coves, marvelled at the calm, sunny weather and had an ideal family outing. For once, we had remembered all necessary equipment such as the charcoal, salt, matches, and even the can opener. It was just perfect ----- too perfect.

We were guilty of one vital neglect --- not once did we listen to a weather report on our transistor radio. This was perhaps my fault. The first day the children turned on some loud, jazzy music and I said, "Please, turn that off! I came here for peace and quiet, and to get away from civilization. "

Friday evening as we were eating dinner in the cockpit of the boat and watching a glorious, fiery sunset, a Filipino rowed out to "Siboney" and informed us that a terrible typhoon was coming straight for this area and that it was due to hit Manila within 24 hours. We were anchored in a cove unprotected from the West which is almost like being in the open South China Sea. Bill said that we must leave immediately and make a run for Manila. I said, "No way am I going sailing in a typhoon!



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There are several empty vacation houses on shore. Why can't we tie up the boat here and the family take refuge in a beach house until the typhoon passes?" Bill Sr's reply was: "Elsie, You and Susan can stay here. The two boys and I are sailing "Siboney" to Manila!" Well, it took me about a minute to make up my mind. I said, "If you and our two sons are sailing this boat to Manila, Susan and I will be aboard!"

With that, I started below with a big can of soda crackers, missed a step and strew crackers all over the cabin. Bill gave a stern command: "Elsie, don't panic!" Next, I swallowed a Marzine seasick pill--best pill ever invented, and gave one to Susan (No one else would take one) Susan and I were the only two who kept dinner down that night and no one panicked again for the next fifteen hours.

All five of us worked furiously. The awning is taken down, cushions stowed below, ropes tightened, Yankee jib put (We never put up the main sail because we figured the mast might break and that we would not be able to get it down during the storm). We prepare to motor out. As the boat moved, Bill, Billy, Jimmy and I lifted the dinghy out of the water. It seemed to weigh a ton and we knocked a hole into it, but got it up and secured it over the cabin -- so if "Siboney" had gone down, we had a worthless dinghy.

We were off into the South China Sea as darkness fell. Bill followed his chart and shined the high powered search light on shore to make sure that we are far enough from land to miss projecting reefs. (There were reefs all over this area). The night is suddenly very dark. We pass close to a little fishing banca and Bill Yells "Typhoon". The word, "Appreciate" echoes back across the waves and we move on. I always wondered about that Filipino fisherman and hope he made it safely to home port before the storm hit.

By about eight p.m., we are out of the South China Sea and trying to enter Manila Bay, but we had trouble making it around Limbones Point and lost precious time tacking back and forth. As we finally got into the bay about an hour later, the boat was hit by cross winds and went around in a complete circle. Now the winds are always mean here because they funnel down from the mountains, but when "Siboney" went out of control, Bill, Jr., who was supposed to be the first mate, became seasick and that meant that I had to take his place in the cockpit. As I said before,



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I'm not a sailor. I came along on this trip to cook, wash dishes, and relax, but there is no better to learn how to handle a boat than in the middle of Manila Bay in a typhoon at night!

The children went below into the cabin with orders to stay there. The two boys were sea sick, but took care of themselves all night. The children remained calm and gave absolutely no problems. All five of us were wearing life jackets by this time.

When we entered the Bay, stars were in the sky overhead and the light of Manila were clearly seen some thirty miles in the distance. (If we had known about that storm three hours earlier, we could have made it. We were that far ahead of the storm.) The lights of the city faded as rain enveloped the sky.

Far in the distance toward Manila, I noticed a moving light, asked Bill what it was and he told me it was a boat. I have always been curious about that boat or ship and never found out who it was. However, they gave a report to a Manila radio station that they sighted "Siboney" between Fort Drum and Cavite at 10 p.m. Friday night. This is exactly where we were and they could identify us because our mast head light was on and we were the only sailboat at sea. In fact, there were no other boats ----- Manila Bay was empty.

Bill, Sr., and I took turns at the tiller. His instructions were to steer to the left of Sangley Light. Sangley is a U.S. Naval Base about six miles from Manila and has a strong beacon. The problem was that the light kept disappearing under the waves. When it became visible again, sometimes the boat would be headed to the right, towards land. Then I would push the tiller away from me and aim again to the left. As I steered the boat that night, I prayed like I have never prayed before in my life. I asked God to see this family safely through the storm and home again. I prayed that the wind would change course. It was coming straight out of Manila. If it were to come from the back, we could go flying home. The wind continued to blow straight out Manila all night. I prayed for the typhoon to veer away from Manila. Many do..... This typhoon maintained its rigid course. I talked to God all night long while sitting in the cockpit of that boat bouncing around on the watery graveyard of Manila Bay, but God didn't seem to hear a word I said!!!



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The storm continued to build up force. After midnight the wind was too strong for our <sup>Yankee Jib</sup> auxiliary motor. For every three feet gained toward Manila, we were being pushed back two feet toward the South China Sea. It was evident that we weren't going to make Manila; that we couldn't even get as far as Sangley Naval Base. "Could we try to sail across the Bay some twenty miles and tie up at Esso's dock?", I asked. "Not with this wind," was Bill's reply. There was no place to go and our only hope was to sail up and down Manila Bay in a triangular or boxlike pattern until we got a wind shift, or to ride out the typhoon. We had to stay away from land (your great enemy in any storm) and we also had to miss Fort Drum, an eleven foot thick concrete fort built by the Americans before World War II <sup>located</sup> in Manila Bay not far from Corregidor and Cavite. Fort Drum had no light!!!!!!

Bill and I sat, side by side, all night in the cockpit in cumbersome life jackets, pulling ropes around winches as we turned the boat. We must have turned "Siboney" over a hundred times. It was hard work. The rope burned by hands. My arms and shoulder muscles ached. After a few hours of this, I began to feel a little slap happy and remember thinking, "How I wish Popeye would miraculously appear alongside with his can of spinach. I sure could use some extra strength right now!!!"

Also, I remember thinking, and I had a long night to do a great deal of deep thinking, but early in the night before the full typhoon was upon us, I thought --- if I only knew that all five of us would come through this safe sound---if I knew where we would all be tomorrow after the storm passes, I could really enjoy this adventure! The phosphorous lights on either side of the boat ~~were~~ beautiful, and as "Siboney" rode up and over the crest of the waves, I thought, "This is just about the best roller coaster ride of my life!"

A flapping, banging noise came from the bow. Howling wind ripped our brand new, dacron jib horizontally into three pieces! Bill went below into the cabin and got another jib, then fastened with his life line safety harness went forward to the bow to take down the torn jib and to put up the new. I was left handling the tiller and tried to miss the bigger waves, but he was doused more than once. The second jib went up, lasted an hour or more when it, too, was ripped into shreds by the wind. Bill went below, found our last storm jib and tried to put it up.



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By this time the boat was bouncing ten or twenty feet out of the water and I don't know how he managed up there alone or how he held on -- maybe by his toe nails.....

The boat remained secure all night. When we bought "Siboney," she leaked badly, but an excellent carpenter from the Manila Yacht Club went over the entire boat tightening all of the seams shortly before this trip. "Siboney" held...

The worst part of the night was from about three a.m. until dawn. The motor went dead. Water in the electrical system caused all of the lights to go out. The sky was a roof of blackness. Rain lashed down upon us. The wind, which began as a soft, low whistle, then increased to a moaning wail over the waves, was now howling and screeching all around us. "Siboney" rode over the crest of one giant wave, through another, then wallowed in the trough in the next. As the keel boomed against the force of sea beneath, waves crashed over our heads, down our necks blinding us with cold, dirty salt water. The force of the waves hurt!!!!!! It was like being hit over the head with a bucket of small stones. No matter how tightly I closed my eyelids or clenched my lips and teeth together, the pressure opened my eyelids and lips and the dirty, coleric, churned-up water of Manila Bay went down my throat!!!!!!

If dawn would only come, I thought ---- Surely everything would be better if we could see something besides black, angry waves...

Dawn finally arrived, and with it --- the full force of the typhoon. All of our jibs were gone. We had only the rudder to steer by. It was difficult to hang on to the boat while sitting on the floor of the cockpit, and we were tied down with heavy ropes. Gigantic waves went over the entire boat. One wave I shall never forget----A force from the sea beneath seemed to go under the port side tilting us to 80 or more degrees. I saw the mast dip further, further toward port; then I looked up to see a solid mountain wall of water thunder down from starboard like a direct broadside. It totally obscured everything and the boat hung suspended on her side for 10, 20, 30, 45 seconds, I don't know -- it seemed an eternity.... And while this boat is hanging half in and half out of the water and while I'm getting hit over the head with a mountain of water, the zaniest thought passed thru my head. I had read the story of Chichester and how he rolled to over 130 degrees in an Australian typhoon and I'm thinking, "If old Chichester can do it, we can too!" Presently "Siboney" righted herself.



Shortly after, Bill told me, "I'm going to beach the boat. Go below and prepare the children." This seemed the end. The shoreline, as I knew it, was all coral reefs, rocks and jungle. I thought the boat would hit a reef thirty or forty feet out, break, fill with water and would drown. I went below and was amazed how safe and secure the cabin felt. To go from the cockpit to the cabin was like going from a raging blizzard to a warm, cozy house. I carried Bill's command out to the fullest, preparing the children for survival and death. First, we checked out the life jackets, whereupon Susan said, "Mine only inflates on one side." Another was found and she put it on. I explained that we were in the midst of a terrible typhoon and that their father was doing all he could to save them, but that they must obey any command instantly, without question or hesitation. I also said that it was possible not all of us would live, that perhaps this was part of a Greater Plan which we were not supposed to understand. With that, I recited the twenty-third psalm to the children, told them to pray and quietly turned our destiny over to God with the words "Thy Will Be Done." Then I sat down on the bunk beside the children and waited.

After some long, minutes, I stood up, looked out through the small porthole and saw - - - - - coming up very fast - - - - - a white, sandy beach and a modern, cement block house!!!!!! It was a miracle!!!! We were all going to live!!!!!! God had been in his heaven over Manila Bay last night after all!!!!

Bill beached the boat perfectly. He unfurled the mainsail from the boom, letting it flap to starboard side and "Siboney" like a speeding surfboard, rode the waves toward shore. Hitting the beach with a soft thud, the boat continued on another thirty or forty feet and stopped almost out of the sea. We climbed quickly out of the cabin, walked to shore in waist-deep and knee-deep water. A few people from the barrio saw the boat coming and a Filipino helped me ashore. Dripping with brown sea water all over our faces, hair and life jackets, Bill and I looked like a couple of drowned rats, but all five of us were joyously happy to be on solid ground.

Soon we were inside the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dionisio Guilbert, Superintendent of the School of Fisheries where young boys are taught fishing as a livelihood. They gave us dry clothes, hot coffee and sheltered us all of Saturday, Saturday night. They were most kind, gave us banquet meals and shared the best of Filipino hospitality.



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Neighbors from the small barrio came with blankets, food, and someone even found candy for the children's Sunday breakfast. Two or three Filipinos told me that they had served in our U.S. Navy and it seemed to me that they were trying to repay American hospitality given them by helping us, the shipwrecked Americans.

Shortly after the Guilberts gave us refuge, Mr. Guilbert asked if we had any valuables aboard the boat, and Bill, Sr., answered, "My valuables are standing beside me-- my wife and three children." However, Mr. Guilbert insisted and when the men went down to check, "Siboney" had been stripped of money, watches, sextant--everything removable was gone. You see, we had landed in Cavite, which is gangsterland! The Chief of Police came later and asked what we lost. I said, "Forget it. We are safe and sound and these material <sup>things</sup> mean nothing." He asked again, so I made a short list, and the next morning, he returned with my wrist watch.....The storm blocked all highways and the looters could not leave the small village. Uprooted trees blocked the main highway.

Also, Mr. Guilbert had a portable radio but no batteries and we had batteries in a cabinet on the boat which fit. When assembled, one of the first news reports told of "Commodore Bill Butler, his wife and three children are lost in this typhoon, presumably their sailboat has gone down somewhere in Manila Bay."

The boat was beached about 8:00 a.m. Saturday. According to Manila Times news clippings, this storm had winds up to 220 kilometers per hour and in the Orient was known as Typhoon Welming.

Sunday morning the weather was calm again. We went out to see the boat. "Siboney", lying on her side in the sand, looked more like a giant whale than a pleasure sailboat. Over a hundred adults and children from nearby barrios came to see the boat and the shipwrecked Americans. I told Bill that he couldn't have chosen a better place to shipwreck and that after last night I thought he was a great sailor. Anyone who could handle a boat, turn it in heavy seas without capsizing, put up and take down jibs when the bow was bouncing up and down out of the sea like a cork ---anyone who could do all of that, is a real SKIPPER!



Also, we hit perhaps the only stretch of sandy beach in Manila Bay. and it couldn't have been more than 100-200 feet wide. Filipinos pointed to the two rows of jagged rock leading into the Bay on either side and said, "It was truly a miracle. Your Guardian Angel must have led you in."

Since trees blocked the highway, we returned to Manila Yacht Club aboard a motorized fishing banca. As we neared Manila, a plane circled overhead. It was a friend who lost the roof of his home in the storm, but was out looking for the Butler family. By this time we had been listed with the missing and dead in radio and newspaper reports. The Stars and Stripes, Associated Press and Chicago Tribune picked up our story and I have an entire scrapbook of news clippings of Typhoon Welming.

"Siboney" was picked up by a giant crane, put aboard a barge and moved to the yacht club, where she was partially rebuilt. When International General Electric transferred us to Caracas in 1969, the boat was shipped aboard a friend's sugar freighter to Panama and sailed to Venezuela by Bill, Sr., Billy, Jimmy and a friend. We had the boat anchored at LaGuaira while in Venezuela. Bill, Sr., and the two boys located and retrieved a 300 year-old French cannon on a reef near Las Aves, some 100 miles out in the ocean. This, we donated to the Playa Grande Yachting Club as a gift to the Venezuelans from their North American friends.

When we transferred to Miami in 1977, the boat was sailed here and is currently anchored on a canal in our back yard. Joe Butler, 15, is her present Capitan. He enjoys many week-end outings with teenage friends to the various keys in Biscayne Bay.

The history of "Siboney" is not clear. We know that Robert Clark designed her. When the mast split in Venezuela and had to be removed, a medallion was found at the base which told us that she was built in England in 1939. I have always wondered: Could "Siboney" have been one of the fleet at Dunkirk when every boat available was pressed into service to rescue the Allied Armies?

In 1978 Bill, Sr., Joe and I sailed "Siboney" in the Columbus Day Regatta with some 600 sailboats. "Siboney" sailed in the Dowager Class, that is, boats thirty years and older, the "Stately Old Ladies of the Sea". We won second place in our class.



Indeed, the typhoon adventure was "Siboney's" noblest feat. She did not betray our trust during that long, storm night, and "Siboney", like no other boat, has earned her distinction as "A Stately Old Lady of The Sea.".....

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