

## **Howard is Saved**

Debbie Leisure on “Illusions” has had experience with adversity. In Carriacou last August her husband John died aboard, her mate for 20 years. Then Hurricane Ivan came, and into the mangroves for a rocking and rolling time. She’s been living aboard and loving it, knowing that her hearty little Island Packet, the source of her passion, in Carriacou can be the source of her destruction.

It’s all about good friends here; from Jerry, Roy, Susan and Gus at Carriacou Haul Out to every cruiser that’s stayed, the likes of John Smith on Mermaid of Carriacou, the Linton Riggs built vessel and the man we were here to honor in the regatta he created 40 years ago, to Paul Johnson the storied yacht builder on Cherub. Jimmy Buffet visited Scraper here in Tyrell Bay because he’s also a friend, and so on.

So when the news of Hurricane Emily reached the small island, everyone knew the drill, or should have. The boat yard was scrambling to care for it’s charges, many on the hook that had to go to the mangroves, everyone went in, like ants following a bread crumb trail, lining up abeam in both ponds.

Debbie’s friend Howard on Serendipity was different though. An experienced livaboard on his trawler, he had tea with her on Sunday, and it was so hard to not see he had issues. Both legs are disabled from polio, useless. He was alone, but so was she. He was proud and a man, maybe that was the issue. When the friends all started to head for the security of the trees that bind the boats to earth so this now Category 1 hurricane would not send them airborne, Howard stayed in the mooring field, aboard and alone.

Everyone cleared out, Emily’s wrath was on course for little Carriacou. Homes were flattened, power was out for weeks afterward, no food, or any public services. Though before she hit, there were mixed weather messages from a downgraded tropical storm to Category 2. Everyone was anxious and fearful, and Howard was alone and exposed.

At 0200 it came, “Mayday, Mayday”, Serendipity was sinking and Howard was attempting to get into his dink on the fly deck as the water rose to it, his disability preventing him from boarding any other way. He had started dragging, fired the engines up with the 2 new screws just 3 weeks old, snagging mooring lines the stern when down, the aft cabin ports blow out as she’s getting pooped and heading to the bottom.

90-110knots of wind blow him to sea. The friends in the mangroves and ashore cry when they here the mayday, knowing they can do nothing but pray. That morning, Debbie speaks to his family in Florida. They are on the way to Carriacou, but with no positive thoughts but those Debbie was able to give, “ his last words were ‘ I’m putting on my vest and getting into my dinghy’, she said to them he sounded strong, confident and calm. It was true but still the friends and family cried.

Howard was blown to sea, 30 miles NW of Union for 12 hours. His terror is his own hell, 7 times being pitched out of the dink, righting it and getting back in, rolling again. His ditch bag was now 20 miles away, lost early in his nightmare, sending an EPIRB signal, but far off he was fighting for his life. The seas settled enough for a

freighter hunkered down in Bequia enroute to Trini to get underway. Howard seized the moment, his outboard cover had reflective tape attached and on an oar tip he swung it around, waving frantically, he was spotted, and the friends and family's prayers were answered, and they all cried together. A one eyed man is king in a world on blind men, Howard is a king among his peers.