



I'LL NEVER FORGET THE DAY...

# My husband had a stroke at the helm

**MARIE PARK:** *When my partner's health took a turn for the worse out at sea, it was down to me to act fast*

**P**icture this: you're on the flybridge after a hard day motoring around the Pointe du Raz in Brittany. The sea is choppy and it's been raining, but just as you reach the cardinal marker outside Audierne harbour, the sun comes out. You're happily planning where to stop for a glass of beer when your husband, who has been navigating the whole time, gives you the fright of your life.

"Marie... where are we?"

I know that Gilbert knows exactly where we are. He has briefed me regularly since leaving Douarnenez this morning. I know he knows this is where we turn into the harbour and keep to the portside, before crossing in front of the fishing port and swinging round towards the marina. I know that he has just spoken to the Welsh harbour mistress, who told him all this and is holding a berth for us. So why is my perfectly capable husband asking me where we are?

As a doctor, I'd had some training in this sort of thing and quickly started thinking of what might have happened. He couldn't take in information and kept asking the same questions repeatedly. I thought I could rule out the possibility of a stroke, but I had a nagging doubt that it might be an atypical stroke – it was out of my area of expertise. The only reassuring aspect was that he didn't seem to be getting worse.

I decided that before dealing with his health, I first had to steer us to safety. My priority was to get us to dry land, but Gilbert's priority was to understand what was happening. Trying to take the wheel from him was like trying to prise a dangerous toy from the hands of a stubborn toddler. I knew how to drive the boat out at sea but I never normally took us into port.

After about 40 minutes, I managed to pry the helm from him while he contacted the coastguard with a Pan-pan call. Remembering the briefing I'd been given, I made for the harbour and stopped by the fishing port to put out fenders and prepare the ropes. I knew that I could get us to our berth, but wasn't convinced that I could get us in without causing damage to our boat – or somebody else's.

Yankee Lady, Marie and Gilbert's 1998 Sabreline 36



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A few minutes later, we were boarded by friendly customs men who had heard the Pan-pan call. One of them brought the boat in to where the harbour mistress was waiting with a doctor on the phone. Happily, communications with the doctor were simple as she spoke fluent French and English.

I felt relieved when we reached the hospital, but when Gilbert disappeared with the ambulance team, I was left with nothing but my schoolgirl French and the receptionist to complete the paperwork.

After some investigations, my husband seemed to improve and started sending texts to our friends and family. Unfortunately, these alarmed the recipients who had no idea what was happening and I was suddenly inundated with worried enquiries.

The decision was made to transfer him to the neurological centre for observation and I would return

to the boat. The next day, I arrived at the hospital in Quimper to find Gilbert fully recovered and excitedly ordering his next meal. He had been diagnosed with transient global amnesia, something neither of us had heard of. We got a taxi back to the boat and spent a couple of days recuperating in Audierne.

I've learned not to panic – just because you're in the middle of the sea when your captain loses his mind, it doesn't mean you'll sink. The Pan-pan call got us the help we needed. I remembered my training and knew I could get us to safety.

The good news is that Gilbert is unlikely to have another episode and will never remember that day. I, on the other hand, will never forget it! **MBY**

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