

## Mariner vs. Mijoy

*The Curse of the Mijoy 747*

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### PART 3 of 3

I have been asked the question, “How do you know it’s the *Mijoy* that has cursed *Orion*? Couldn’t it be something else that is causing the problem?” Realizing my own shortcomings as a sailor contribute at least in some small way, I shall explain my deduction that *Mijoy* must be the cause of *Orion*’s curse by a simple process of elimination of the other possible constants in each unfortunate episode.

1. **The Railroad Bridge.** It is true; the incidents involving the *Mijoy* do all take place within close proximity to the Railroad Bridge. However, all other times that I have passed underneath the bridge (which is almost every time I go sailing) and the *Mijoy* has not been around, everything has been fine. Scratch the bridge from the list.
2. **The outboard motor.** Only two of the three events (including the upcoming story) have dealt with some sort of engine problem, and there have been two different motors (a 2.5 and a 4 hp Yamaha outboard). Scratch the motor.
3. **My wife, Liz.** Liz has been with me to witness each episode with the *Mijoy*, but she has also been with me for many other successful and non-harrowing outings in *Orion*. Take Liz off the list.

No, the *Mijoy* it is. Of that, I am convinced. This third and last installment details a unique night attack.

Every year, my hometown in Connecticut has a “Celebrate East Lyme” weekend. Many vendors sell their wares along Main Street in Niantic, music groups play at different locations, and everyone has an exciting time. The festivities culminate with a fireworks show on Saturday night, the fireworks themselves launched from a nearby park into the sky above the Niantic Bay. Last year, Liz and I decided to take *Orion* into the Bay,



anchor, and watch the display from the comfort of the cockpit. As the event drew closer, more guests were invited to come on the boat with us – namely my father, sister, and grandparents.

Saturday night came soon enough, and before long everyone was onboard *Orion* having rowed out to her mooring from the beach. I sat aft near the motor while my father went up forward to let us off the hook. Everyone else was happily seated in the cockpit, eager to start our little trip. The motor started with just two pulls of the lanyard, my father cast us off, I put the motor in gear and we were on our way. It was starting to get dark, so I switched on the portable battery-operated running light I had previously lashed to the backstay and ask my father to do the same to the lights I had lashed to the bow pulpit.

We drew closer to the railroad bridge, and, noticing the bridge was down, I turned on my VHF, making sure I was tuned to Channel 13.

“Nan Rail, Nan Rail, this is the sailing vessel *Orion*, come in, over.

“Nan Rail, go ahead.”

“Yes, I’m outbound about four minutes away; just looking for your next opening, please, over.”

“It will go up right now.”

“Thanks very much!”

I settled back as a couple other small powerboats, also with running lights on, radioed the bridge-master to let him know they would be following me out into the Bay. As we slipped underneath the bridge, I looked back to see a small flotilla of boats headed down the river so they might enjoy the fireworks from the water as well.

Once in the Bay, I saw many other boats already anchored with their anchor lights on. I maneuvered *Orion* through the maze of boats, getting close to the park on the opposite shore from where the fireworks would be launched. Turning into the slight wind and putting the motor in neutral, my father once again went up to the bow and removed the anchor from its holder on the pulpit. Once we had lost headway, he let the anchor go over the side. I had him let out about 50 feet of rode in about ten feet of water – the anchor held fast as I put the engine in reverse and increased the throttle to ensure we were secure. I shut the motor off and moved up forward to enjoy the show.

We could hear music coming from the park over loudspeakers, and within a short amount of time the first firework shot up into the air, exploding above our heads. For the next 30 minutes we all enjoyed a wonderful display, watching as different shaped and colored explosions lit up the Bay. It was quite a memorable sight, sitting there, gently rocking with a hundred other boats, and we all agreed it was over much too quickly.

When the show was done, a great cheer went up from all the boats and the spectators on the shore. Hardly a minute had passed before engine after engine came to life, and the great exodus begun. One by one, each boat raised anchor and turned to head back to the River. We did the same, although I decided to keep the motor off for that moment and sail back under jib alone, as there was a healthy breeze coming off the starboard quarter. The roller-furler jib rolled out with a satisfying “whump”, and the water gurgled from the bow as we picked up speed. Boats had already begun to get in line to make their way through the bridges, and we searched for an opening.

It was at that point the hair on the back of my neck stood up. As I slid into formation just ahead of the bridge, I saw the *Mijoy*. She was in the formation, a few boats back. She was lit up like a Christmas tree, and I wondered why I had not seen her before. *Oh well*, I thought, *at least*

*there are a few boats between us to act as a 'buffer'*. I continued ahead as the boats in front of us began to pass underneath the bridges.

*Orion* sailed closer to the railroad bridge, and I decided it was time to furl the sail and start the motor. Liz began to roll up the sail from her seat in the cockpit, and I turned around to pull the lanyard. One pull – nothing. Another pull – nothing. Again – nothing. I pulled out the choke. Three more pulls. I pulled out the choke more. *Oh, come on, I thought, not now – you've always been so reliable!* Another four or five pulls yielded no response. I looked up to see some concerned faces. The bridge was coming up, there was a line of boats behind us, and we had no power.

This had never happened before with this motor, and I could not believe it was happening at that moment. There must have been 40 boats behind us, waiting for me to get my act together. I kept pulling the lanyard with no positive result, and *Orion* was coming to a halt. I glared at the *Mijoy*, her bright lights shining back at me like a toothy, mischievous grin.

With the breeze still up, I decided to unfurl the jib. Liz, closest to the sheets, pulled the jib back out while my father came back to throw all my weight into the motor's lanyard. I kept the tiller in hand as *Orion* began to make headway, and we started to get back on track, albeit with racing heartbeats and nervous glances. We slid underneath the iron gantry of the railroad bridge, headed for the highway bridge. At that point, the VHF crackled to life.

"To the sailboat in front of me, can you go any faster?" He sounded impatient. And rude. I looked behind me and saw a powerboat hardly a boat-length away from *Orion's* transom.

"Negative; I have no power," I replied.

"Sailboats are not supposed to sail through the bridges! That is illegal, did you know that?"

"I'm having engine problems, buddy – I'm doing the best I can."

I was very tempted to say something else to him, but I refrained and kept my cool. Finally, after fiddling around with the motor a little more, it roared to life with one last pull on the lanyard from my father. He went back up forward, I put the engine in gear, the jib was rolled up, and we were finally underway at a good clip. We got to our mooring safe and sound without any further problems. A final glance backward revealed the *Mijoy* was not far away, headed for her own slip.

I considered this incident somewhat of a "glancing blow", as it was not as nerve-racking as the other two times we met. I believe there is a certain power in knowing that something *will* happen; to *expect* some sort of disastrous result whenever the *Mijoy* is nearby makes me prepare for them that much more. After all, was it not the famous G. I. Joe that proclaimed, "Knowing is half the battle"? So, while I am convinced this curse is real, I have resigned my self to live with it and share the water with *Mijoy*, making the best of it. Here's to you, *Mijoy* – may you have good fishing excursions, but may we meet only once in a great while.

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#1922, *Orion*