

Vigor's Inter-denominational Boat Naming Ceremony

by John Vigor

I once knew a man in Florida who told me he'd owned 24 different yachts and renamed every single one of them.

"Did it bring you bad luck?" I asked.

"Not that I'm aware of," he said. "You don't believe in those old superstitions, do you?"

Well, yes. Matter of fact, I do. And I'm not alone. Actually, it's not so much being superstitious as being v-e-r-y careful. It's an essential part of good seamanship.

Some years ago, when I wanted to change the name of my newly purchased 31-foot sloop from *Our Way to Freelance*, I searched for a formal 'denaming ceremony' to wipe the slate clean in preparation for the renaming. I read all the books, but I couldn't find one. What I did learn, though, was that such a ceremony should consist of five parts: an invocation, an expression of gratitude, a supplication, a re-dedication and a libation.

So I wrote my own short ceremony - 'Vigor's Inter-denominational Denaming Ceremony'. It worked perfectly. *Freelance* carried me and my family many thousands of deep-sea miles both north and south of the Equator, and we enjoyed good luck all the way. I used the same ceremony more recently to change the name of my newly acquired Santana 22 from *Zephyr* to *Tagati*, a Zulu word that means 'magic', or 'bewitched'. We're hoping she'll sail like a

witch when I finally get her in the water this summer after an extensive refit.

I'll give you the exact wording of Vigor's denaming ceremony, but first you must remove all physical traces of the boat's old name.

Take the old log book ashore, along with any other papers that bear the old name. Check for offending books and charts with the name inscribed. Be ruthless. Sand away the old name from the lifebuoys, transom, top-side, dinghy, and oars. Yes, sand it away. Painting over is not good enough. You're dealing with gods here, you understand, not mere dumb mortals. If the old name is carved or etched, try to remove it or, at the very minimum, fill it with putty and then paint over. And don't place the new name anywhere on the boat before the denaming ceremony is carried out. That's just tempting fate.

How you conduct the ceremony depends entirely on you. If you're the theatrical type, and enjoy appearing in public in your yacht club blazer and skipper's cap, you can read it with flair on the foredeck before a gathering of distinguished guests. But if you find this whole business faintly silly and embarrassing, and only go along with it because you're scared to death of what might happen if you don't, you can skulk down below and mumble it on your own. That's perfectly okay. The main thing is that you carry it out. The words must be spoken.

I compromised by sitting in *Tagati*'s cockpit with the written-out ceremony folded into a newspaper, so that any passerby would think I was just reading the news to my wife, sitting opposite. Enough people

think I'm nuts already. Even my wife has doubts.

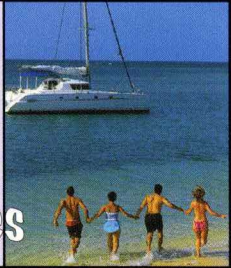
The last part of the ceremony, the libation, must be performed at the bow, just as it is in a naming ceremony. There are two things to watch out for here. Don't use cheap-cheap champagne, and don't try to keep any for yourself. Buy a second bottle if you want some. Use a brew that's reasonably expensive, based on your ability to pay, and pour the whole lot on the boat. One of the things the gods of the sea despise most is meanness, so don't try to do this bit on the cheap.

What sort of time period should elapse between this denaming ceremony and a new naming ceremony? There's no fixed time. You can do the renaming right after the denaming, if you want, but I personally would prefer to wait at least 24 hours to give any lingering demons a chance to clear out. (See the wording of the ceremony.)

Afterwards

But for now you can pop the cork, shake the bottle and spray the whole of the contents on the bow. When that's done, you can quietly go below and enjoy the other bottle yourself. Incidentally, I had word from a friend last month that the Florida yachtsman I mentioned earlier had lost his latest boat, a 22-foot trailer-sailer. Sailed her into an overhead power line. Fried her. She burned to the waterline. Bad luck? Not exactly. He and his crew escaped unhurt. He was just very careless. He renamed her, as usual, without bothering to perform Vigor's famous inter-denominational denaming ceremony. And this time, at long last, he got what he deserved. ↓

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Vigor's Denaming Ceremony

"In the name of all who have sailed aboard this ship in the past, and in the name of all who may sail aboard her in the future, we invoke the ancient gods of the wind and the sea to favour us with their blessing today.

"Mighty Neptune, king of all that moves in or on the waves; and mighty Aeolus (pronounced EE-oh-lus), guardian of the winds and all that blows before them: We offer you our thanks for the protection you have afforded this vessel in the past. We voice our gratitude that she has always found shelter from tempest and storm and enjoyed safe passage to port.

Now, wherefore, we submit this supplication, that the name whereby this vessel has hitherto been known (___), be struck and removed from your records. Further, we ask that when she is again presented for blessing with another name, she shall be recognized and shall be accorded once again the selfsame privileges she previously enjoyed.

"In return for which, we re-dedicate this vessel to your domain in full, that she shall be subject as always to the immutable laws of the gods of the wind and the sea. In consequence whereof, and in good faith, we seal this pact with a libation offered according to the hallowed ritual of the sea."

Christening Ceremony

After a boat is denamed, you simply need to rename it using the traditional christening ceremony, preferably with Queen Elizabeth breaking a bottle of champagne on the bow, and saying the words:

"I name this ship ___ and may she bring fair winds and good fortune to all who sail on her."

The author was a member of the Point Yacht Club and well-known newspaper columnist before emigrating to the USA many years ago aboard his Morgan 31. He has since become a respected boating writer and editor, and has written a number of books on sailing. Some of his titles are being reviewed in *SAILING*.

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