



## Fairweather Friends Wrecked MY BOAT!

### Description

## What happens in Juneau is supposed to stay in Juneauâ?!

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**This story began with that phone call nobody who lives in a coastal Alaska community ever wants to receive late at night. It was from my supervisor’s wife who was asking if her husband, with the prescient first name of ‘Fate,’ had told me he was taking my boat out to go fishing.**

He hadn’t, but it was alright if he did take it out. It happened occasionally and that’s just the kind of friend I was.

Fate's wife had already called the Coast Guard because he was missing and Fate's vehicle with my boat trailer connected to it was parked at the **North Douglas Launch Ramp** across the bridge from Juneau. It was dark, nobody had heard from him, and she was worried.

As it turned out she had good reason to be worried.

**Douglas Island is across Gastineau Channel from Juneau. My wife, Cathy and I lived in Juneau. A search had been launched. According to the *Juneau Empire* news report:**

*A family member told the Coast Guard at 11:23 p.m. Saturday about the overdue party and their expected fishing area. The **Coast Guard's Juneau Station** sent a crew of three on a 41-foot rescue boat at about midnight, said spokesman **Mark Hunt**.*

*About three hours later, the crew saw the beached men waving sticks glowing with embers. Rescuers brought the boat to about 50 feet from the shore, and a swimmer carried a survival suit and two dry suits to the men.*

*“We just piled into them,” **(Patrick) Flynn** said. “We floated on our backs and they sort of towed us in.”*

*[//juneauempire.com/stories/050498/rescue.html#.WgDvzGhSzIU](http://juneauempire.com/stories/050498/rescue.html#.WgDvzGhSzIU)*

**It was the first week of May, 1998, and still cold that year. I had just paid for all new canvas coverings with clear zipper windows around the boat. Everything was in top shape.**

**As Fate should have it, I was confident of my boat.**

A 17-ft **Boston Whaler Montauk** is a nearly unsinkable watercraft. I've seen **Alaska State Trooper** boats exactly like this one. In early advertisements for this boat they put a man aboard and then cut it into two parts with a chain saw. Both halves continued to float and the man stayed on top of the water.

This particular Boston Whaler had an oversized motor on it because it had been a Sitka boat. When you are out in the waters around that community—which directly faces the **Gulf of Alaska**—you had better be able to get into harbor in a hurry when bad weather is on the horizon. I had bid on this boat as a Credit Union repossession and it had the ominous registration numbers **AK 1313K**.

I named the boat **Win-Win** because I had been the second bidder, but when the first bidder was told he won the boat he acted like a jerk and they withdrew the offer. I offered less than the high bidder so it was a “win-win” for me.

**There wasn't much I could do about the whereabouts of my boat that night but I was relieved the next morning when Fate and the two companions he had taken fishing were back home safe.**

The report in the Juneau Empire was succinct:

*Rep. **Ethan Berkowitz** and two companions were rescued unharmed from **Portland Island** early Sunday after their skiff overturned Saturday night.*

Berkowitz, an Anchorage Democrat, his aide **Patrick Flynn** of Anchorage, and **Fate Putman** of Juneau, the assistant business manager for the **Alaska State Employees Association**, were trolling for king salmon off the west side of Portland Island when a wave swept over the stern and rolled the 18-foot Boston Whaler.

It's always news when a legislator screws up in his personal activities in Juneau. That was the official report.

What Fate later explained to me was they were trolling and all three of their fishing lines hooked onto the bottom at the same time. That required them to all try to pull their lines loose at the same time standing side-by-side at the stern of the boat. That is where the heavy motor was also. As they were screwing around with their lines the water was sneaking over the transom cutout for the motor and filling the boat. Before long enough water was in the boat and enough weight was in the stern that the boat slow-rolled. I understood they all realized it at the same fateful instant and Fate had to actually swim out from under the boat. He was wearing a Mustang survival suit.

What happens in Juneau is supposed to stay in Juneau and that is the non-politically correct version of what happened.

The three of them clung to the bottom of the boat and it drifted to shore demolishing the canvas I had just installed as it scraped along the bottom.

Again, from the news report:

*They remembered seeing smoke from a campfire on the east side of **Portland Island**, which is west of **Auke Bay** and north of North Douglas. They hiked the western length of the island, rounded the southern point and found the campfire, now dwindled to a small ember. Using a Dixie cup left there, driftwood and sea grass, they built a fire and dried their clothes.*

Thank God for litter; this may have saved them from hypothermia.

*For Fate, who is six-foot-five, it was a wade, Flynn said today. For me, who is six-foot-two, it was half swim and half wade, and for Ethan it was mostly swim, according to the report.*

I wasn't too happy about this chain of events, but there wasn't much I could do about it. Yeah, they were sorry that they weren't paying attention and wrecked my boat, but stuff happens, you know!

Rep. Berkowitz received some recognition from the legislature for surviving this ordeal; they gave him a round life-preserver with his name on it. Yuk-yuk.

We went out and salvaged the boat and I got to hassle with an insurance company over how much they were going to pay to replace it. The motor was a total loss and I ended up buying the hull back for a minimal amount.

I told the Insurance Adjuster how much I expected them to pay for the boat, based on how much I had insured it for. He didn't take me seriously, citing the fact the trailer hadn't been damaged. It took a few telephone exchanges before he realized my absolute expectation.

*Have you seen the classified ad in the **Juneau Empire**?* I asked him.

*Yes, what is that about?* he responded.

The ad: ***Have you or somebody you know been screwed over by Allstate Insurance on a legitimate claim? If so, call this number: 463-3826.*** (I still remember my Juneau phone number even today!)

Well, I began to explain to the adjuster, *this ad was the beginning of an effort to be paid what I was owed. I am now collecting names and information of every person ever pissed off by his company in Juneau. If he is smart he will give me the check for the amount I am asking right away,* I explained.

*How is that going to work?* he asked.

I explained: *If we don't reach settlement in a week that same ad will go to the **Seattle Post Intelligencer** newspaper. I expect to get every screwball and enemy of your company to join my class action suit. If you don't settle once I also place the ad in the **Anchorage Daily News** the following week, your boss is going to call you into his office and ask: You refused to settle with a guy named LISTON for how much?*

I got the check for the full amount the next day.

**Everybody in Juneau knew what happened and it never occurred to anyone there that the people who borrowed my boat might be expected to compensate me for my loss. I have been disappointed in people who exploited my good nature, even recently as regular readers likely already know.**

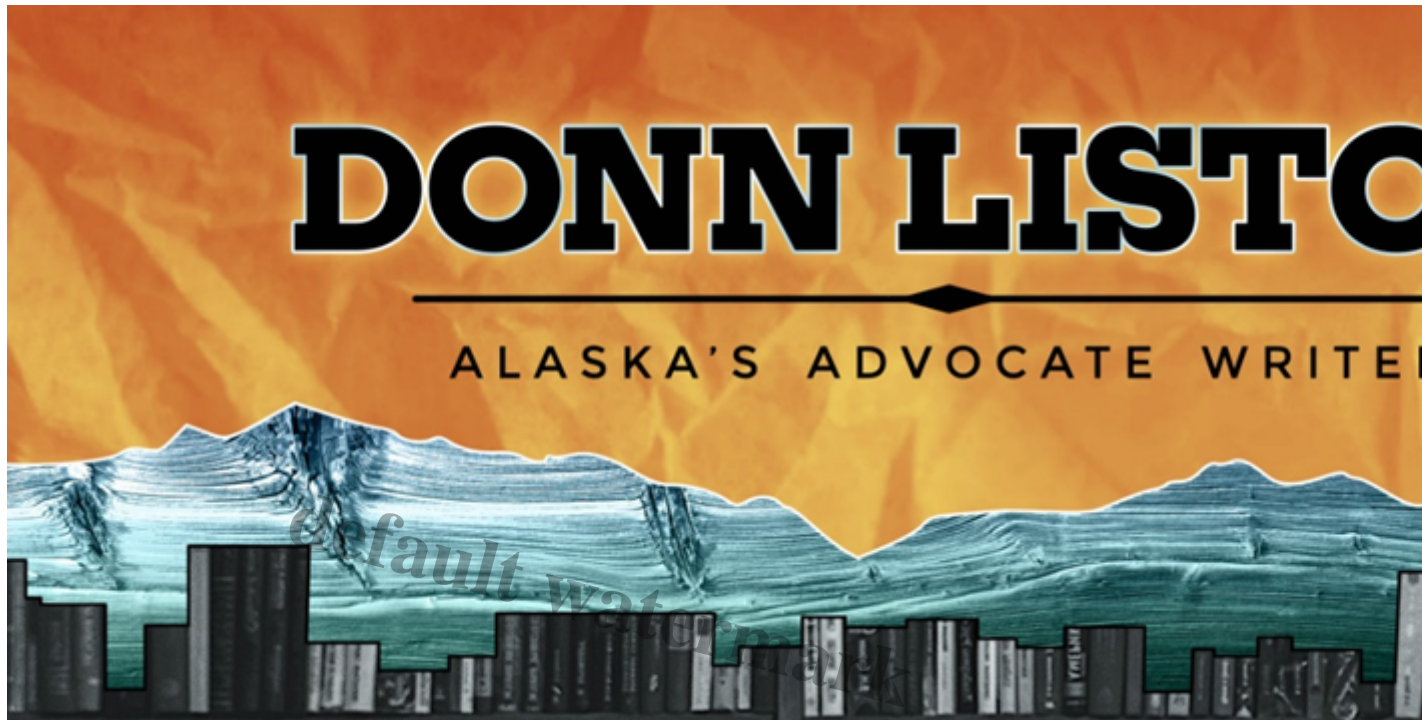
Once the hull was cleaned up and everything restored to good order, I made a flyer with the above photo announcing it was for sale. I posted all over Juneau.

The headline read:

**Boston Whaler boat with trailer for sale!**

**Very Safe Boat**

**Couldn't even drown three Democrats in it.**



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