

## **NIGHT WATCH (on our 1984 sailing trip to NZ)**

Three hours on, three hours off  
Two of us, 1000 miles from land  
A 38-foot spec in a giant ocean  
With a single reef in the main  
A quarter knot concession to the importance of sleep  
Local squalls, invisible at night,  
Stress both rigging and nerves

No moon tonight – sailing in an inkpot  
Endless motion, incessant water noise  
Visibility skyward, 50 light years and more  
But seaward, barely to the mast or our wake

Why keep watch when there is nothing to see?  
Various reasons, but only one is compelling  
A collision at sea can ruin your day  
An oncoming ship's light can be seen 12 minutes away  
Sleepy helmsman, cruising on autopilot, radar ineffective for sailboats  
Collision avoidance – the challenge is entirely ours!

So, lost in my thoughts, or listening to tapes  
I am at one with the night  
Till the 8-minute timer calls me to duty  
Stand up, two complete turns, scan the horizon  
Confirm that the reddening star is not a ship's portside light  
Duty done, still afloat, time to wake Liz and get some zzzzzz's  
But not a moment before her time.