

## **[Nearly] shipwrecked off Albania by Rosemary Thurlow**

'Come afloat on George's boat' the tatty sign said at the harbour. It was a hot sunny afternoon in Corfu town and the idea of a sea cruise along the coast appealed to both of us. So we and several others hopped aboard, payed our monies [I can't remember how much, this was pre-euro] and sitting on rough wooden benches were taken off into the calm Ionian Sea.

George, our Greek skipper didn't say much, he looked a bit like the Birds Eye fish fingers advert with his beard and cotton top, rough sandals and cigarette. But he managed the boat well, obviously a seasoned sailor and as the glasses of rough local wine were being imbibed we all relaxed and enjoyed the coastal splendours of Corfu.

About an hour into the trip someone asked what the land was over to the east in the distance and was told by George it was Albania and he was prevented from sailing any nearer. What would happen, someone asked, weren't they friendly? And with that a loud boom was heard, something hit the water not far from the boat, George shouted to us to 'put down your heads 'and quickly got the boat to perform a nautical three point turn and we swiftly returned back along the coast.' They not friendly' George explained,` it always happen to him, never any other fishermen's get fired at. Now we go home before that storm catches us' and he indicated the dark clouds above us that had appeared from nowhere.

The sea had got rougher and now the rain was coming down in torrents, none of us had brought macs, well you don't on a warm sunny September afternoon, so we all sought shelter in the boats engine room, crammed in like sardines, all laughing nervously, desperate to reach the harbour. The diesel fumes and wine in my stomach were beginning to make me feel somewhat nauseated and never have I been so glad to step onto terra firma.

George himself was quite relaxed as he helped us off the boat, smiling and dishing out little printed cards 'Come afloat on George's boat' they announced.

Never again we said quietly to each other!