

Commodore's Corner

May, 2011

It is a warm summer day and the wind is channeling a perfect 18 knot breeze out of the northwest. The boat is gliding through a gentle sea when you notice a pod of dolphin headed over to surf along the bow. You look over and see your friend, whom you have invited for her very first sail, begin to show signs of a smile. True, you could look over and find her face losing color, her eyes bulging, and hear an "I'm fine" squeak through lips that barely move for fear something less attractive might come spewing out should she open her mouth any further. But today the stars are all in alignment and her grin wins out. What is more, there is a twinkle in her eyes. Yup, you've got her. She's hooked!

For those of us who are already hooked, I would say there is no half way about it. By that I mean you either love sailing or you hate it. Whether you are a day sailor, cruiser, racer, or all three, you are passionate about the sport. But how were we exposed to this thrilling ride? Someone must have invited us to share in their passion.

For me, I was seven years old when my father chartered a 30 ft. sailboat to take us from Miami to Bimini. The sun went down and we untied the lines, setting sail across the Gulf Stream where I fell hopelessly in love. Who wouldn't after a midnight sail and waking up on the bow of the boat to the sunrise over Bimini; the turquoise sea gently rocking us to and fro as I watched the waves caress the sparkling white beaches. I was at peace and I was smitten.

For my friend, Aixa, it was her grandfather who took her cruising off the coast of Puerto Rico. She and her cousins spent many an afternoon joining him on his 52 ft. Hatterus. He made it fun and interesting for the children by playing games with them. They would see who could sight the first dolphin or guess the correct depth by dropping seltzer tablets in the water. He would teach them to read the sea by observing the change in the colors or the wind on the waves. It is because of mentors like my father and her grandfather that Aixa and I were to become enchanted with the ocean. They shared with us their passion.

In April I was in Oakland at the Strictly Sail boat show where I heard 17 year-old Abby Sunderland speak. When questioned about her age and the critical media attention regarding her attempt to sail solo, non-stop around the world, she said, (and I am paraphrasing here) "What has happened to the American spirit? I think we have lost touch with our sense of adventure, the adventurous spirit that brought us to America."

I immediately thought of my ancestors who left Wales in the 1600s due to religious persecution. Mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, all jumped onto a ship, crossed an ocean and built a new life in an unknown land. Our country would not be where it is today without the brave, courageous and adventurous spirit of our forefathers. I dare say they might be proud of Abby.

Over the last couple of years there has been much controversy about our children sailing the ocean. How young is too young? How far is too far? In all honesty, I wrestle with this question. I do know, in hindsight, that as an overly protective mother I have left my teenage children wanting for a few life skills as they walked out the door and into the world. That is why our youth in sailing programs are so important. They give our children the skills and confidence needed to be safe and competent sailors while having a whole lot of fun.

There are many ways to encourage and instill a love for sailing and our local community is rich with a plethora of programs. In the Channel Islands Harbor alone, there are several opportunities. One is the summer sailing program and Thursday night race series that The Pacific Corinthian Youth Foundation offers. Another is Fairwind Yacht Club working in conjunction with the Boys and Girls Club. In Ventura Harbor there is the Ventura Yacht Club Youth Sailing program which includes a summer program, a race series, and a Sunday series, as well. At Leo Robbins Community Sailing Center, they host a summer camp for children ages eight to fourteen. After they graduate the program at fourteen LRSC encourages the teens to come back and mentor the younger children. These are just a few examples of the many ways in which our community comes together to teach our children about the sport of sailing.

This month the Channel Islands Women's Sailing Association and Anacapa Yacht Club has rallied together with the local merchants to support youth in sailing by hosting the First Annual Hawaiian Luau and Barbecue, and I want to thank each and every one of you for your generous contributions. However, I propose we take it one step further. On a warm summer day, when the wind is strong and the sea is calm, when the stars are all aligned, take a child for a sail. Share the passion.

See you on the water,

Terri Potts-Chattaway