

On the *Adventress* the skipper calls for sailing stations, and the cabins below decks cough up 23 half-formed adults. Teenagers. Some are still undeveloped children wearing a thin veneer of bravado to help beat off the impact of teen society. Others are bone-lean from the growth spurts. Most are half grown: young men with long legs, huge hands and tiny torsos, full bloomed women sporting braces and ragged sneakers.

It is day five of the Youth Sea Symposium, a three week program that begins with a week aboard the sail training schooner *Adventress* and continues on land with classes in boat building, sail making and marine biology. The symposium was spawned in Port Townsend's community of marine craftsmen and organized by Mary Deitz, director of the Wooden Boat Foundation. It runs on the volunteer labor of a community that believes sail training is still one of the best ways that character is formed.

The system is simple. The young man or woman is cooped up with 20 contemporaries and 6 or 7 adults on a 101' ship surrounded by miles of ocean. His survival depends on the other people on board, his knowledge of the physical world and his wits.

There haven't been any serious injuries in the 20 years the *Adventress* has operated as a sail training vessel, possibly because safety has always been the highest priority. "The danger is the same as driving a car," says program director, Ernestina Bennett. "We emphasize that you have to think, to learn to cope with the danger."

During man-overboard exercises, 23 dubious teenagers jump over the rail into the chilly waters of Northern Puget Sound. It's an education to feel your body react to the cold, to observe the effects of panic, the hyperventilation. Bennett shows them that slowing the breath controls the panic. Five minutes treading water provides a person a good introduction to himself.

But mostly coping with danger is a matter of developing systems. Sailors aboard the *Adventress* are divided into watches, and for the symposium, each watch is assigned to one of four duties: sailing watch, science watch, galley duty or classes. Every two hours crews change watches.

Five positions make up the sailing watch. Bow watch stands harnessed to the rail on the lookout for vessels, logs or other obstructions in the water. The bow watch reports everything he sees to the helm. He must remain standing and abstain from conversation, focusing his awareness on the water. The group's safety depends on his



Launching of the *El Toro* completed in the Boat Building Class.

staying alert, and he knows it.

Similarly, a harnessed stern watch keeps a keen eye out for men overboard. The messenger rings the ship's bell to mark the half hour, runs errands for the mate, keeps communication going through the watch and listens for messages on the ship's radio. The helm controls the ship, while a fifth crew member follows the ship's progress on the charts, where he must locate present position, fix destination and estimate time of arrival. He also has to locate aids to navigation and hazards and advise the helm of these.

While one watch performs these essential duties, another works with field biologist Jenna Correa surveying marine birds and mammals and recording data. They record air temperature, barometric pressure, cloud height, water temperature and salinity and study the relationships among the systems that produce weather. Using the spotting scope and binoculars, sailors search for porpoises, seals and whales and identify birds. "The idea is to get them to open their eyes and be aware of what's going on around them," says Correa. "Yesterday two girls on science watch were the only ones to spot an eagle diving for fish."

Classes are a down-to-earth study of the sailor's needs, starting with learning ship's lingo so they can talk about what's happening aboard. It takes most of the week to learn the names of the hundred or so lines that control the ship's rigging. But this lesson is impressed on their tender minds by the daily reality of working them. "The hardest part of the whole program," remarks one student, "was pulling the

throat halyard."

A whole universe of rope opens itself to these young people as they learn to belay a cleat properly, coil the lines clockwise and keep the decks neat. They master splicing ragged ends, fabricating baggy wrinkles and tying a knot that could save a boat. In a tugboat bowline contest the last night aboard, half the sailors could tie the knot in under 3 seconds. The best time was 1.24.

A lot of the rope lore comes from Kit Africa, who one of the kids described as "a funny man with a funny hat and a wealth of knowledge." Kit, whose father was Spike Africa, "president of the Pacific Ocean," was raised in a sailing tradition. Today he is a boat builder who specializes in traditional rigging. Agile as a blond monkey, Africa scrambles through the rigging hanging baggy wrinkles or adjusting the sails. He spends the week passing on nautical tidbits like how to tie a knot with your arms crossed. He teaches them how to take bearings off of two or three known points on land and find the ship's location by calculating the relationship between these points. He shows them how to measure ship's speed by tossing a cracker off the bow and clocking its run to the stern. At times he digresses into a complex explanation of why eating candy makes your brain weak.

Carol Hasse teaches them the points of sail and how to avoid putting the ship in irons or slipping into an uncontrolled jibe. Hasse is part owner of the Sail Loft, an all woman sail making operation based in Port Townsend. During the winters she teaches off-shore cruising in Tahiti, Bora Bora and the Leeward Islands. On board the *Adven-*



ness she teaches piloting, tides and currents, rules of the road and basic sailing theory. "I'm in love with life," she says, "and I like sharing that with kids."

Skipper Karl Mehrer has honed leadership to a fine art in this utopia that is the *Adventuress*. A man in his fifties, the Skipper has one of those handsome, healthy faces that laughs at age. In the younger days he put in time in the Merchant Marine and became a Coast Guard certified captain and engineer. His involvement with Sea Scouts goes way back, and he has captained the *Adventuress* on and off for the last 20 years.

Skipper is a conscious and deliberate authoritarian. "This is the last frontier of dictatorship," he chuckles. And it's the first time some of the kids have ever experienced a definite no that means no. No Walkmans on deck; no talking on watch; no going below decks in rough weather. The discipline is based on necessity. There are the potential dangers of the ship's heavy rigging, the chance of falling overboard. Discipline is enforced in the strictures of watch duties and ritualized in morning colors where the crew stands at attention for briefing on the plan of the day. Each day Skipper emphasizes safety, the need for staying alert, looking out for the other guy. Often he adds a brief homily. "If you've got problems, maybe your sails aren't set right," he says. "Maybe it's not something wrong with the world. Maybe it's your responsibility... Remember, sailors: it's not the gale, but the set of the sail." Grown-ups love this stuff. The kids giggle nervously when you ask them about it.

But the bottom line of discipline is awareness. Skipper pulls these sailors away from the sensual kaleidoscope of MTV, the ambiguities of the teen pecking order, and gray sanctuary of school and grades and brings them into focus on the nitty gritty. The kids eat it up.

And then there's work. "Life is so easy at home," says Ernestina Bennett. "Here they have jobs that are hard and that make sense." On the *Adventuress* the young sailors are swabbing the deck with salt water while the galley watch cooks breakfast, Maintenance on a 101' wooden schooner is a duty that constantly renews itself. Every day young hands are polishing brass and neatening the deck.

Free time is pretty social. The symposium has 23 youngsters on board bunking in two large areas below the decks. Most have their own rooms at home, but on the ship nobody has any privacy. Space, food, work: everything is shared. The kids look jealously upon the deck house where adult mates can go for quiet moments alone. "But they learn," says Skipper, "that mentally they can be alone, even with a bunch of kids around."

But mostly they prefer testing the world by bumping up against one another, "I see lots of different social skills develop," says Hasse. "I see kids having to back off and treat each other with more love and respect. "They're at an age," she continues, "where they're working at what to do, not only with their heads and hands but with their hearts."

Aboard ship one message that is reiterated constantly is that nobody lives separately. Nobody talks during sailing stations because, says Skipper, "if you can't communicate, you're in trouble." It takes three or four people to haul on some of the heavy lines, and if you slack your hold, somebody else gets hurt. "They can't stay individuals," says Bennett. "They think about the group and the group thinks about them. They become a family, fast."

Such families have formed and reformed aboard the *Adventuress* since the early 60's, but she was originally conceived as a luxury yacht. Built by Rice Brothers of Boothbay

Maine in 1913, she was a B.B. Crowninshield design. For her rigging, sail makers Wilson & Silsby sewed 4571 square feet of sail. Then as now she had a stable rig, with gaffed fore and main sails, a stay sail and a jib.

Her original owner was John Borden, a Chicago taxi cab magnate who wanted to use her to gather specimens in Alaska for the New York Museum of Natural History. But Borden left too late in the year and didn't get far before she started taking ice. They returned without specimens and the *Adventuress* wintered in Victoria, B.C.

The next year the San Francisco Bar Pilots bought her to stand off shore near the Golden Gate Bridge. There she was used to house pilots waiting for incoming ships that needed their services. The bar pilots replaced her gaff-rigging with marconi sails and added a deck house. She served in this capacity until the early 50's. At some point during the bar pilots' ownership, a fire below decks burned out her luxury interior.

During the 50's she changed hands three or four times, but nobody could manage to keep her up. She slid quietly into disrepair.

In the 60's Monty Morton, a real estate developer, bought her for use by the Boy Scouts, and soon after Ernestina Bennett began taking her Girl Scouts aboard for sail training too. Bennett's husband calls her a "professional volunteer" who has spent much of her money and energy working with youth. Though she had never sailed before, she became deeply involved in sail training and developed the program that's used today. Bennett served as program director from 1970 until 1974 when Morton wanted to get rid of the *Adventuress*. At that point she and husband Stan bought her and turned Youth Sea Adventures into a non-profit corporation.

Since then the *Adventuress* has been restored to her original condition with the exception of a deck house and the space below decks where two large program areas replace Borden's luxury cabins. Four watertight bulkheads have been installed, the ship rewired and the engine overhauled. Decking, deck beams, frames and planking were replaced, the stern rebuilt, new masts and rigging built and installed. The unending renovation and maintenance is accomplished by a large group of volunteers who work weekends during the winter. Mates for training cruises are chosen from among this lot.

Thanks to the volunteer labor, the ship squeaks by on a budget of \$100,000 a year. She takes out about 700 sailors a year: teenagers during the summer and "youth of all ages" in the spring and fall. Bennett em-

WATERLINES

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Skipper Karl Mehver — Captain of the *Adventuress*.

phasizes that this is not a charter ship but the best sail-trainer in this country.

At the end of the week, the now-seasoned sailors drag their peeling, sunburned bodies off the ship for two weeks training on land. Though building confidence is still an important goal, the focus is on careers in the marine trades.

The director of Port Townsend's Marine Biology Center, Judy D'Amor teaches the kids how to test for water quality in the laboratory. then she takes them to the Port Townsend Paper Mill where lab workers expose them to the complex system for dealing with industrial effluent. Back home they role-play some of the social conflicts inherent in water quality issues, taking the parts of regulatory agencies, businesses and ecological groups.

Meanwhile Kit Africa teaches boat building, starting with lofting and lay out, moving on to the use of hand and power tools right through to the completion of an eight foot El Toro, built with mahogany and marine plywood.

Once outside the utopia of the *Adventuress* and the spell of Skipper's discipline, the kids begin to get a little restive. "It's harder to get them to pay attention here than on the boat," explains Africa, because if they don't pay attention there, they get killed."

Ushering youth through the rigors of creating a sea-worthy craft is a little much, even for Africa, who is a kid's adult if ever there was one. "I'm avoiding getting ulcers and hemorrhoids," he remarks ironically, "only through deep Zen concentration." In spite of the hassle and the constant babble of teenage tongues, the learning means a lot to the kids. Especially the girls who have never worked with wood before and find they love it.

During the evenings they make a sail for their El Toro. Hasse takes them through design, layout, seaming, cutting, second machining, reinforcing and hand work. "One kid had never handled a pair of scissors before," she says. They find out how tough it can be to work a sewing machine.

While on land the kids live together in a Victorian house, taking turns with the cooking and cleaning duties as they did on the ship. Friendships evolved. "We know each other better now," says one girl, "the good parts and the bad."

They continue to learn to sail, working with small boats donated by locals. It gets easier to set up the rigging, to trim the sails, to feel the tension of the sheets.

The sailors paint their boat bright blue and orange and christen her *The Wind Cries Mary* for Mary Deitz, the woman who made



the symposium happen. They get their diplomas, embrace their instructors and say goodbye.

That many of them worked all winter to pay for the symposium indicates how hungry they are for this kind of learning. If they leave feeling stronger, it's because they are stronger. They know how to handle themselves on the water and to build a boat with their own hands. They are more competent than they were. "You teach self-confidence to kids," says Hasse, "by letting them know what they can do." □