

"Friendship" - Lessons For Life

Turbines and propellers have taken the place of sails and rigging, the great tall ships have nearly disappeared, their captains and crews are gone. All of the oceans are charted now and science has added radio, radar and GPS to chart, compass and sextant but lessons distilled from the sea are still as meaningful as ever.

Joseph Conrad spoke the definitive words: "The sea never changes and it's works for all the talk of men are wrapped in mystery." Few people understand it, nobody can tame it. No one who lives with the sea can ever be sure what it will do to him. The origin of all life, the taker of many, the sea is the toughest master one can ever serve. Often warm and placid, other times cold hearted and foreboding, sometimes steeped with wind driven waves; like a lover with a tiger heart it can rise up from a deep sleep and swallow the largest ship.

To get to know the sea you have to be close to it, be wetted by it, learn to fear and respect it, love and enjoy it. From the earliest times until the present day, mariners agree that the best way to learn about the sea is to be on it in a ship propelled by the wind - a Sailing Ship. The way of a ship in the midst of a sea is a way of life. When you put to sea your world quickly shrinks to the distance between stem and stern, port and starboard. Shipmates become your link to survival. When asleep below, it may only be the skill and cunning of the crew on watch that separates the sailor from eternity. As has been said, "If you can keep alive afloat, you must know what you are about. Unless a man is worthy, the sea will surely find him out."

Sir Lawrence Holt, cofounder of Outward Bound explained that sail training takes people beyond the technical and recreational aspects of pure sailing and seamanship. "The training" he said "is far less for the sea than it is through the sea." "The challenges of the sea better suit you to the subtler challenges of life" said Capt. David Wood, Executive Director of the American Sail Training Association (ASTA). And, as Emerson said: "The wonder is always new that any sane man can be a sailor." "He that will learn to pray, let him go to sea." Detractors will say that being at sea on a sailing ship is like being in jail, with the added risk of drowning. Others will say it is the most divine form of transportation.

A calm sea will never make a good sailor. At the start, no one knows what a voyage will bring but if you must be on the sea you must learn it's ways. Fair weather or foul, there is no end to a day at sea. No Mondays, Fridays or holidays. Only time to rest while off watch. Ashore feedback often takes time. At sea, it's usually immediate. If something brakes, you must fix it. If it tears, you mend it. If it stops, you start it. To survive at sea, a good sailor must not only be a navigator and tactician but also a weatherman, mechanic, electrician, plumber, carpenter, seamstress, cook, doctor and sometimes father confessor. From deckhand, to mate, to skipper; if a man sails in a good ship long enough she will make him a different kind of man - a sailor.

*Like so many things in life, being a good sailor requires a combination of patience, leadership, skill and luck; however, when luck comes, you must be ready. Even today, the maritime colleges and academies of nearly every sea faring nation train their young men and women to sail. Many of the great tall ships have been preserved, rebuilt and like *Friendship*, recreated in an effort to permit new generations of young men and women to learn how to take orders and to give orders, the skills of seamanship and above all, to be ready.*

*Aboard ship lessons are not only taught but tested. Sail training ships like *Eagle*, *Enterprise*, *Kruzenshtern*, *Juan Sebastian de Elcano*, *Ranger*, *Amerigo Vespucci*, *Sagris*, *Danmark*, *Simon Bolivar*, *Nantucket* and others, large and small prepared their crews not just for a life at sea but for life itself. The lessons learned and the stories of voyages aboard these ships are legend. Young sailors "learned the ropes"; buntlines, clew lines, leach lines, sheets and halyards. They also learned the importance of teamwork, perseverance, honesty and interdependence. As *Irving Johnson* said: "While sailing a ship in foul weather, there is a remarkable force of some kind that makes scores of ordinary men surpass themselves. You might call it *the religion of sail*."*

However, sailing is not just about tacking and jibing, reaching and running, it's about having the opportunity to share a life filled with marvels and mysteries. Sailing produces a feeling of freedom and lasting memories that few endeavors can equal. Only the sailor can feel the sheets strain as the sails fill and the ship moves forward propelled only by the wind, see the shores from their other side, listen for the hiss as the setting sun kisses a tropical sea, watch a flaming moon rise above an invisible horizon, witness astronomical pyrotechnics in an unencumbered sky, hear the ship's bell summon the mid watch, pray for the morning light while being hurled blindly through a dark and storm tossed ocean and finally rejoice at sighting the sea buoy just where he hoped it would be at the end of a fog shrouded voyage. Even then, the wise sailor will know that he has not beaten the sea but, in a benevolent moment, *the sea has only let him pass.*

Most of the great tall ships, "the pride of all who sailed them and the wonder of all who saw them," have now passed into history. Dacron and Aramid have taken the place of Cotton and Manila. The Courses, Tops, Royals and F'Gallants of the great Clippers and Full Rigged Ships have been furled for the last time. Steam turbines and diesels now propel war ships, super tankers and giant container vessels, some longer than four football fields. The legendary tall ships have been replaced by mechanically powered marvels filled with a myriad of technological wonders as necessary to compete in the business world of today. But sailing ships like *Friendship* and the lessons they have to teach continue to have their place, for like a beautiful woman; when the terrors of stormy weather are forgotten, the wind is right, the sails are full and the ship is in perfect harmony with the ocean, they are still the summit of perfection. Then, as the poet says, "*they walk the water like a thing of life.*"

Amen

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