



HAPPY SAILS

Students in the Canandaigua Yacht Club class last year searching for the wind.

Can an amateur learn to navigate the waters of Canandaigua Lake?

Story and photos by **Joy Underhill**

MY ROMANCE WITH THE IDEA OF sailing began decades ago when I first saw colorful spinnakers gather the wind to move trim vessels across the water. Imagine the power, the excitement, the chance at finally deciphering all that terminology in *Moby Dick*.

Of course, dreams and reality have a way of bypassing each other, and I didn't follow through until well into midlife. Last summer, when I recruited my sister to take sailing lessons with me at the Canandaigua Yacht Club, I discovered that sailing is a dance with three partners: exhilaration, boredom and sheer terror.

Day 1 was an eye-opener. Yes, those knots you learned in scouts *do* matter. And yes, sailing is a sport best mastered when muscles are still supple, and balance a mere afterthought. Still, the students ranged from newlyweds to retirees, all bent upon learning how to make a Sunfish glide.

After knot practice, we headed to



The Yacht Club lessons were thorough: It wasn't until Day 3 that students got out on the water.

the shed where our instructor, Dick Raymond, showed us how to assemble a boat. We learned a whole new lingo: luff, heel, halyard, clew, gudgeon, painter and my favorite, baggywrinkle—a covering for cables, often made from old rope.

Next we grabbed the equipment and began to clip, tie, insert and redo under the supervision of Dick and his wife, Sue. Then we headed down for our water work: first, what to do if you tip over.

It proved a valuable practice. Beginners are likely to experience this at least once, and learning how to right the boat was a vital lesson. Fortunately, Dick had told us to wear bathing suits.

We started Day 2 in the launch area, practicing the all-important commands between skipper and crew, such as “Ready about!” (I’m going to turn!) and “Hard a-lee!” (I’m turning!). We also learned why starboard and port matter, and the essential courtesies of sailing. Dick used toy boats with moveable sails

to demonstrate how to control the boat depending on the direction of the wind and where you want to go.

By Day 3, we were practically pros at assembling a Sunfish. And we were ready to practice our navigational skills with the goal of sailing close enough to touch a buoy without running into it.

I soon learned that sailing is like learning to drive a car: It’s easy to oversteer. The big difference is the fuel. With a car, you can fill up anywhere. With a sailboat, you have to continually find the fuel (the wind), accept the rationing of the heavens and learn how to slow down without brakes.

Lucky for us, Dick was tooling around in his motorboat, testing the wind and shouting out commands when we needed assistance. I can’t remember the number of times we heard “You’re luffing!”, meaning our sail was getting floppy so we weren’t catching good air. It took practice, but soon all of us were trained to watch the sail and use the tiller

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That's not to say we weren't challenged. At times we barely missed colliding. We discovered how the wind could die suddenly and leave us motionless in the middle of the lake. I even admit to dumping my sister in the drink when I turned a little too quickly. Like downhill skiing, sailing is all about mastering the speed of the wind without letting it scare you to death.

Which brings me to Jim, the sole non-swimmer in the class. Why would someone afraid of the water take up sailing? "It started during this trip last summer on Lake Ontario," he said. "It was so quiet out there on the sailboat with no motor. I felt my cares just melt away." I could relate to that.

When the weather didn't cooperate, we toured the harbor to learn about sailboat designs. Dick explained how the unfortunate name of his first sailboat—*Schmucky Poo*—is the reason why all of his sailboats (and his cottage) have a Pooh Bear theme.

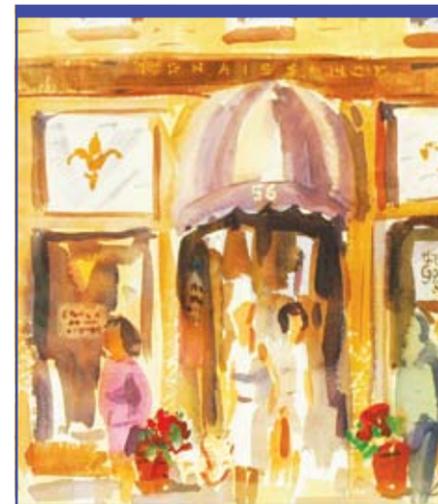
By the end of the lessons, my dream was realized. I could hold my own with the language of sailing, at least at dinner parties. I had gone from fearing the swing of the boom to being able to predict it. And above all, I had felt, for a few glorious hours, a little like Jackie cruising out of Hyannis with JFK. ■

Ready to set sail?

The Canandaigua Yacht Club is offering several sailing lessons this summer:

- Three sets of eight-session adult lessons, June 26 to Aug. 6: \$150.
- Basic youth lessons (8 all-day sessions): \$450.
- Youth camps (ages 7 to 9) for beginners, in July: \$250.
- Youth lessons for intermediate and advanced sailors, in August (four all-day sessions): \$255.

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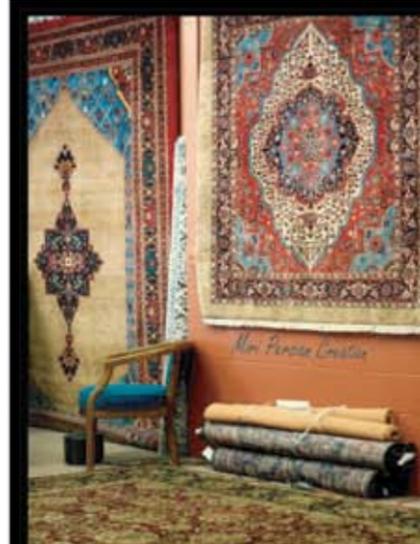
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