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Y2A BY ELLEN EBERT BIRRELL

# Bequia Traditional Sailing Academy

Alick Daniel is clear on the messaging he wants to see for the Bequia Traditional Sailing Academy and its future: "I don't want parents saying (to their children) 'you go over to Alick's sail loft.' I want them to say 'go over to Bequia Traditional Sailing Academy.'" He walks me to the open door of his upstairs sail loft in Port Elizabeth. Pointing to the railing, "Be sure to read the banner."

The Bequia Traditional Sailing Academy (BTSA) Mission Statement: "To develop the skills of our sailors through the provision of sea skills training and certification, and to provide sailing experiences which will produce smarter, safer and better equipped seamen and women."



Motto: "Keeping sailing alive through skill and determination."

Walking farther down the wooden stairs, he points to a not yet fully enclosed building where they've been repairing and building double-enders for years. He says, "This is the building we'll be using as the clubhouse. I'd like to name it Latitude 13. I want youth to understand that they are to learn more about seamanship and navigation not just sailing our traditional boats." This is why it is called an academy and not a club. The aim is on education. "Our boats are based on the seagoing boats of New England. We invite sailors who travel down here from there to come and teach us."

The academy started after a sailing mishap when two Bequia double-enders, 24-foot *Limbo Dance* and 28-foot *Iron Duke*, were transiting to the annual Carriacou Regatta on a Friday afternoon in late July 2012. The initial plan was to have the boats towed by a powerboat. When it didn't arrive on time, the crews decided to sail the boats down. Tropical Storm Ernesto was arriving with 12-foot seas and raging winds. According to the September 2012 *Compass*: "After *Limbo Dance* had a problem with its mainsail and *Iron Duke* was unsuccessful in attempting to tow *Limbo Dance*, all of *Limbo Dance's* crew except [two young men] boarded *Iron Duke*, which returned to Bequia. *Limbo Dance* also turned northward and sailed under jib alone." Missing Bequia, *Limbo Dance* continued north. They were off the central St. Vincent coast when they realized their error and turned back toward Bequia. They were rescued that Saturday evening by a passing mail boat but not before the entire region was engaged in a full-on search. That the boys had been missing for 24 hours



deeply alarmed the Bequia community. When it was ascertained that *Limbo Dance* carried no lifejackets, flares, VHF radio or other safety equipment, the SVG National Emergency Management, SVG Coast Guard, Bequia Disaster Preparedness Committee, Rainbow Radio League and the Deputy Director of Grenadines Affairs called a meeting, making sure the sailors became aware of the enormous search-and-rescue effort comprising local and regional agencies, individuals, radio operators, vessels and airplanes involved and the importance of taking safety protocol seriously. "After that, Louise Mitchell was instrumental in helping to start BTSA with the aim of preventing such near disasters in the future," Alick explains.

Selma and Alick Daniel have a teenage son, Lincoln, who is involved in the Academy. Selma tells the story of Alick sailing her in a 14-foot double-ender from Bequia to the Carriacou Regatta when she was 24 years old. "Before I leave the beach to get into the boat, he told me it would take five to six hours." As a non-swimmer/non-sailor, was she afraid? "Once we sailed around West Cay (the south-western edge of Bequia's Admiralty Bay), I wasn't afraid anymore. I relaxed. When I got out (of the boat) in Mayreau (for lunch), it was pretty. Just so alive." Asked how she could possibly have the courage to make that sail as a non-swimmer, she replied, "And there were no lifejackets in the boat." You could say trouble has been waiting to happen for some time. As an instrument for teaching sea safety, BTSA's time has come.

The Academy hopes to one day offer a certification. At this time, they are doing all they can to assist young sailors coming out of BTSA to get their Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW). STCW certificates can be earned by those over 18 years of age. There used to be great expense organizing a trip to a country that offered the testing. Now, it can be completed online.

For fundraisers, BTSA has made and sold macramé belts, spice baskets, hammocks, coconut boats, and tools. They stopped awarding typical trophies at sailing events. Instead, they've come up with practical awards. In one event, the winner received an electric planer. At another event, a saw.

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