

Sailing for Self-Discipline and Independent Thinking

I believe the development of youth sailing is important for The Bahamas and the Caribbean generally, not just because we are all island nations and sailing is part of our heritage but also because, more than most sports, sailing provides self-discipline and personal responsibility for one's own decisions and actions, abidance by the rules and dispute resolution. Sailors enforce the rules against each other rather than an umpire on the sideline. Nor is there a coach on the sideline directing the state of play. Sailing improves an individual's critical thinking skills and helps to offset a culture where kids are told to do as instructed and not think for themselves.

— Lori E. Lowe, President, Bahamas Sailing Association

The definition of self-discipline is "activity, exercise, regimen and/or training of one's self, usually for improvement", and that of independent thinking is "to employ one's mind rationally and objectively in evaluating or dealing with a given situation". This month's Y2A offers a sampling of voices from those in leadership across the Caribbean about the value junior sailing brings in the form of developing self-discipline and independent thinking skills for Caribbean youths.

Coming from Dominica, Hubert Winston of the Dominica Marine Center in Roseau tells us, "One would say that the traditional sailors of the Caribbean are vanishing and it's a rarity to see young sailors or able boat crew from the Caribbean. This is very much the situation in Dominica and many other Caribbean islands, and it is why I have decided to embark on the momentous task to introduce sailing to the

Services says, "One thing I will say for learning to sail and developing independent thinking is that most of us learn to sail on single-handed dinghies. Now, even though we learn the basics on shore, once we get out there we realize the wind and sea state are constantly changing and we, in turn, have to make changes to be successful. It is the same with life situations, which are always changing, and we need to know how to change to make the best of these situations."

Jon O. Oliver of Belize summarizes the goals of junior sailing programs: "To train these kids in the qualities that can lead them into being honest, productive and successful citizens. That apart, sailing itself teaches sportsmanship, fair play, teamwork, self-reliance and other characteristics which they will need as they grow up."

If there is one thing we know, time passes. Children grow quickly to teenagers and



Left: The author with Dominica's Hubert Winston



Right: Antigua's Ashley Rhodes

youth in Dominica. It is an escape and a salvation from the dangers of idle minds and spirits. [Through junior sailing] they learn discipline, respect, responsibility, organization, teamwork, accountability, lifesaving techniques, swimming, care of self, others and equipment and, finally, how to sail."

From St. Lucia, James Crockett, owner of Jus' Sail Charters, adds, "Sailing really is a wonderful classroom for developing these traits. Why? For one, boats have numerous parts and components that require regular and often constant attention; without self-discipline those parts will become neglected and when Mother Nature throws up a change in conditions for the worse, any neglect can often become glaringly apparent to the detriment of vessel and crew. While on passage the seaman has no option to give up; the only choice is to carry on and make it to a safe harbour. This demands and naturally builds resilience and self-discipline over time — the benefits of which will be felt by the individual in all areas of life."

Out of English Harbour, Antigua, Ashley Rhodes, owner of A&A Rigging & Yacht

then to adults. What tools are we giving them to make this passage? For island children, the advantages of self-discipline and independent thinking will bode well to usher them toward gainful employment. Strong and secure individuals in turn build strong and secure families, communities and nations.

Ellen Ebert Birrell attributes her opportunity to cruise the Caribbean aboard Boldly Go with partner Jim Hutchins to life skills built in childhood. Believing swimming and sailing are essentials for island youth, she supports junior sailing and serves on the Caribbean Sailing Association Sailing Development Committee. Visit caribbean-sailing.com/youth/youth-programs for more information.

Youth2Adult – Y2A – is a series of articles celebrating sailing's role in youth development. If you know of a Caribbean youth sailor or adult candidate for featuring in Y2A, please contact ellenbirrell@gmail.com.



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