

# CURRENT'S AGAINST US





and hilarious fun we couldn't possibly have planned it. I mean, if you're going to shipwreck, it might as well be at the best lobstering spot in Mexico, right? The incident was similar to others we'd had on the boat but for whatever reason this time the healthy happy family crew dynamic on board meant that no one was ever really scared and that we could all talk about and execute repairs together in a way that everyone felt confident with. So wildly different than previous similar experiences. The only things I can definitely credit are that all our expectations and experience were on the table and that the group was happy enough, confident enough, and trusted one another enough so that no single incident could tip the scales enough to where anyone was angry or afraid. Most of the winter went like that; after R&N left my family visited, which was weird and great. J helped me cope with it like a grownup instead of the 16yr old I usually turn into around them. Other crew and guests came and went, once J almost died and another time we almost lost the boat. Through all of it there was a constant trust in one another, mutual respect, openness, honesty, and hilarious laughter. Moreover our basic goals for the winter and for the trip were virtually parallel. That is to have shit tons of fun and get really good at doing stuff; we succeeded on both counts. The only small communication breakdowns that ever happened were easy to deal with once we recognized them for what they were. I just can't believe it was so easy. I can't believe I never pulled it off before.

In the end I hope that for the folks from the earlier trips the bitterness towards me and the boat eventually and inevitably fades so that they will be able to gain more from the positive things that did happen on those trips. If it's fond memories of sunsets, fish we caught, or even things that they learned. Because, even in my shame at how I have behaved, I know I learned a lot.

#### Q. Closing thoughts?

A. This stuff is hard to write about, and I usually don't write at all. I know I have a lot to say, but it usually comes out over beers and around campfires. Having to put it in print puts it in perspective; I hope that it motivates me to write more. I love meeting and connecting with new boat folks, seeing their projects and hearing their ideas. I'm excited to see everybody's contributions to the zine and website. I hope that folks that come across them are motivated and inspired by them. There's nothing I'd like more than to see more boats of our unconventional ilk out there, and I think that the only thing more important than learning from each other's mistakes is co-inspiration. So, see you out there?

## August 2013

---

Nearly a year ago, we sent a call-out for submissions to be included in a publication about radical sailing. We hoped to reach people who had lived life on the seas in new and exciting ways in order to share ideas and stories while adding to the growing subculture of radical sailors. This zine showcases some of the submissions we have received and facilitated.

While we enjoy a good yarn as much as the next salt, we also wanted to see other sides of what people were up to. We attempted to actualize our ideals while exploring our interests of living a life at sea, finding other people doing the same along the way. Exploring this in a way that was deeper and more reflective than just the stories we carried, we wanted to approach living aboard boats as we approach our lives, with intention. Throughout the years we've had the privilege of networking with and befriending quite a few sailors who are attempting to live the lives they desire at sea. This is often an uphill struggle for anyone, especially for those whose ideals lie directly in conflict with society or the state. Often times we're fighting to make space for our lives, let alone to live them. The sea offered us a glimmer of a freer landscape, a frontier that we imagined to contain promise that might have space for us. While the reality of the waterways has become cemented into some of our lifestyles, we continue to dream of how they could be different and closer to what originally brought us there.

In a way this is "by sailors for sailors" and much of the jargon and assumed knowledge might be alien to those without experience out on the oceans. We hope that the messages and ideas behind this are able to reach beyond the context they're presented in. The format we've chosen to pursue is rather specific (sailing), while the impulse is rather broad. Folks have been attempting live within adventure and escape as long as there has been something *to* escape. The submissions we've received, while not always directly related, have similar themes and come from similar desires.

This project continues on past this zine. Our website hosts writings and submissions not contained in here along with links to active communities of radical and anarchist sailors. We will be continuing to post new content on the site as we receive it, and encourage those who find affinity within this content to participate. In addition to the media aspect of what we're doing, we also hold get-togethers, tours, readings, and other events. Our largest goal is to be a part of, and help foster, community around sailors with radical ideals. Hopefully this contributes to that current; we're enjoying seeing it grow. The amount of work living aboard typically necessitates can kill off our original ambition and trap us in our own logistics. Perhaps if we keep in touch with each other and hear about the amazing things other people are doing at sea we can maintain some of our radical perspective and continue to work towards the fantasies that brought us to the seas in the first place.

## Contents

---

<u>Back to Land, Out to Sea</u>	1
<i>by Steve Stevens</i>	
<u>Untitled</u>	13
<i>by Saiya Miller</i>	
<u>A Discussion on Crew Dynamics</u>	15
<i>facilitated by Currents Against Us</i>	
<u>Untitled</u>	31
<i>by Emory Rotten</i>	
<u>An Interview with Margaret from S/V Drummer</u>	34
<i>facilitated by Currents Against Us</i>	

that if I had another year that left me as worn out and depressed as the previous few I would have to sell the boat.

There was no one left on the boat more experienced or capable than myself, and certainly no one more familiar with the boat and her whacky systems. In short, there was no one for me to dump my captain's responsibilities on. Nervous about how the season would progress I only made the vaguest of travel plans with friends and potential crew, not wanting to commit or make promises of being places I might not go. I asked one friend, J, if she would come sailing for the whole winter, hoping if there was another person invested in the boat and the voyage that taking on shorter-term less committed crew would be easier. J had sailed with me twice before, short stints before getting off the boat early with her backpack- frustrated and disappointed with the bungled communication aboard. I asked her in particular because I thought her to be completely sane, reasonable, patient, and drama free. I suspected she got along with everyone and was extremely brave and capable. I know these things for sure now because she agreed to sail with me, meet me in Mexico, and spend the whole winter on the boat with me. I don't know how she felt agreeing to come down, or why she did it, having already left feeling disillusioned twice. I guess I had finally made some of the changes she and others had wanted to see. In any case she extended more trust to me than I deserve, and gave me a third chance. I'm glad she did, WE HAD SO MUCH FUN!

### Q. So what changed?

A. J and I arrived at the boat on the same day and started in on a bunch of exciting projects the boat had needed for too long. We were lucky in that the projects we were working on were varied and fairly easy to do but left the kind of permanent visible improvements that make working on them satisfying. It was easy to stay happy working together & we kept each other updated on how we were feeling and our expectations. We set aside full-moon time (no joke, it's Steve's idea) once a month for talking about feelings and expectations. When the day came, we rarely felt that there was anything left that needed to be said. We checked with each other regularly and also both took alone time to do the kinds of things we each need to do to feel sane. We took time outs regularly to swim, ride bikes, fish, sail, drink too much, or laugh till our sides hurt. The best part is I still think we got more done in that first month in Mexico than I've ever accomplished in a single month working on the boat.

By the time our first crew of the winter (R & N) came down to meet us in Mexico that winter, our home and family life aboard *Drummer* was so open, happy, and functional that the transition of two additional people on board was smooth. The crew, a couple, had bought return tickets and were only with us for a short stint during the passage to Honduras. We were clear with them before they bought their tickets that there would be work to do before we left, weather to wait for, and that even then anything could happen, which it did. We had an almost comically typical human error-combined-with-equipment failure thirty miles off Cozumel and had to make a decision about where to go ashore to make repairs. In the end we spent several days anchored out in a beautiful bay repairing things, swimming, fishing, and coconut hunting. It was such constant

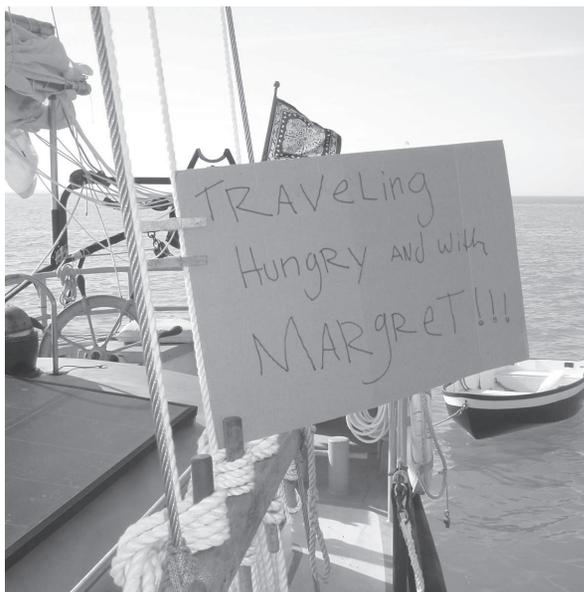
“anti-authoritarian.” I’m not sure what that word means in this context... I’m not sure if I’m it. I assume this is a “no captains - no masters” question? On a boat travelling with other folks it’s really good if people have clear roles and responsibilities, often experience based. In the end someone usually ends up being some kind of “captain,” how they choose to handle that is as variable as the people it happens to. In smaller crews, like say couples, I don’t think it needs to happen. In larger groups I think it helps everyone feel safe, cohesive, and clear as to what’s going on if each person’s experience and jobs are well defined. I think there are many bad ways to be a captain, but there are many ways to take a supportive leadership role as well.

**Q. Do you feel that people leave the boat with a positive experience? What have some of the barriers been to this and what has worked well?**

**A.** Until this year most of the people who had sailed with me on *Drummer* have left either unhappy or furious. I think they have almost all left swearing they hated either me, the boat, or even sailing, and have all more or less sworn they would never set foot on the boat or sail with me again.

When I first sat down to write about this I puked out five full pages of stories of all the awful things I had done as captain, boat owner, and project manager on *Drummer* since I got her. I retold all the stories of all the reasons people were justifiably angry with me. The thing was heartbreaking to read and boring, not to mention humiliating. In the end I can pretty much safely say that I have made every mistake in the book, but I don’t think I need to revisit them in public. My mistakes were mostly seated in my own inexperience, insecurity, and fear coupled with the inability to fully admit these things or be honest about their depth. I took advantage of other people’s generosity and experience freely but did not always give them the thanks or credit they deserved. People were too often cheated by my poor communication and robbed of their experiences by my personal criticism, inner negativity and my ability to so turn situations that don’t necessarily have to be unpleasant into miserable ones.

This year coming back to the boat things were a little different. I wasn’t a part of any bigger projects, there was no bigger mission beyond trying to sail the boat peacefully with others, go new places, learn new things, and have fun. I knew



## Back to Land, Out to Sea

*Throughout the past few decades the ideal of getting “back to the land” has been embraced by radicals across many spectrums. The politics of an anti-civilization or green-anarchist critique romanticize the idea of land projects, re-wilding, and attempting to find a less mediated life through a more direct union with the natural world and order. Motivated by this impulse and attempting to expand the forms this desire can manifest, some of us have taken to the sea on boats. Here we’re reflecting on the ideas behind these attempts and exploring how one experience has failed and fulfilled its original motivations.*

“It’s not the despair -I can handle the despair. It’s the hope I can’t handle.”

To think of things as atomized occurrences crafts a rather bleak narrative: failure after failure line up to showcase the slideshows of our lives, our ideals miles away from our attempts. Underneath this procession of embarrassments, regrets, and mistakes lie the moments where things worked; our medals of pride during trying times. Often we take these moments, highlight them, and try the same things again, hoping for different results. Some folks fall to the wayside throughout the years, finding solace and comfort in alternatives to their original ideals. The more stubborn of us make attempt after attempt at the same dreams, changing the conditions slightly in hopes “this time it’ll work.” Many the aging dreamer is coming to terms with the fact that they’re on schedule to be well into their “long term plans.” Despite racking up skills and life experiences, things don’t seem to be getting easier, especially for radicals and other folks who decide to live in defiance to cultural norms.

Many of us were entranced by the idea of “going back to the land.” This dream was spoken to by stories of and visits to land projects, by tales of and guides to re-wilding, and even captured by popular media evident by the amount of times many of us have been told “you **HAVE** to see *Into the Wild*.” This idea was often shelved for “later in life;” you know, when you have more money, have found the community you want to be a part of, when you know where you want to settle down ostensibly forever. “Later in life” comes closer by the day, and many of us haven’t reached any of the aforementioned criteria. In the interim we’re often spending time with the people we want to be around, deepening our relationships and making steps in the impossible struggle of treating each other decently. We’ve toiled through collective houses and consensus meetings, often tired through the process but accepting it as worthwhile since we still believe in the ideas behind them. We’re learning skills the whole way: skills that enable us to communicate with each other and ourselves better, skills that teach us about the world around us, natural and otherwise, and how to survive in it. Many of us have also been romanced by travel, be it from now-embarrassing zines from our past, stories we heard, desire and entitlement to see the world, or simply wanting to see what the internet and media has shown us. Transience has been labeled as the bane and blessing of the radical scene time and time again. New folks show up breathing life and offering outside perspectives while shaking up your world. Friends move away, leaving all of their responsibilities with them. It’s not uncommon to go somewhere a year later to find everyone has moved away.

What are we supposed to do with these directly conflicting urges? The desire to

have some agency over a space you're in, to feel connected to it in a way where the landlord can't just steal it from you in a moment, butts against the push to explore while moving through the world, leaving all the things you've worked on and the people you worked with. Perhaps we don't have the resources or commitment for the land project we dreamed about years ago. Maybe we don't want to be traveling forever, feeling uprooted every time we say goodbye and at times feeling like we have little to show for our lives other than stories. Although I didn't make a calculated decision weighing the aspects of the things I wanted and how they could coexist, after spending the past four years living aboard a small plastic sailboat I felt there were ways these seemingly conflicting desires of mine came together. With a life of failed projects, schemes, living situations, and travels behind me I took some of the sparks of successes from my life thus far and tried to make my boat into the dream I had of my land project from years ago. Instead of going back to the land, I went out to the sea.

### The Allure of the Ocean

I was drawn to boats and the ocean because of the mystery and promise. I didn't know much about sailing so, as with many things we fall in love with, I bound ignorantly into it head first. Over the years, myself and people who have sailed on the boat I owned (around 60 folks from what my memory recalls) tried to create a space where we could enjoy ourselves, each other, and the places we went. It could be looked at as an experiment from one angle, but being it was my life I'm too close to it to see it that way. We attempted to uphold values and operate with dynamics we wanted to see; we being a diverse population of folks who had very different, and at times conflicting, desires. Most everyone who spent time on the boat was from some sort of radical background (punk, anarchist, queer, etc), so often times we had similar frameworks to draw from and similar tools to work with (consensus, collectives, etc). It was like having the dynamics of a collective house, the responsibility of land ownership, the logistical needs of traveling, and the problems of a campaign or project, all in an unfamiliar environment that is incredibly harsh, unforgiving, and unpredictable at times. So needless to say, there wasn't a moment when our hands weren't full.

In this piece I speak about collectives often. I want to emphasize that I'm not advocating collectives as the most valued or ideal format for us to be taking. It is one format that I feel experienced in and, being I desire a social nature to my lifestyle, desire at times. I don't think there is inherent value in a collective, nor do I think it's worth preserving for its own sake. A collective is an approach to utilize towards another goal. When the collective format isn't servicing the needs it's seeking to accomplish, it's time to abandon it. This format is the one I attempted and is perhaps an overly formal way of discussing how myself and the persons around me related to each other. At no point did any of us refer to what we were doing as a collective, it never had that intention. Our intention was to sail around with friends and like minded folks, collective operating and consensus were simply tools we used to accomplish this.

### The First Crew

I bought my boat with a friend with another considering buying-in as well. The idea was similar to most projects: we were a few close friends who were coming from similar levels of experience (low to none) bringing an array of skills and

allow) the others that I sail with to get more involved with the plumbing and mechanical projects because everyone wants to be trusted and encouraged and most people want to learn and practice a wide variety of skills within or without their comfort and experience level, regardless of their gender. As a minority female captain, I'd like to create an environment where everyone can learn and thrive. And I promise I'll really start doing the dishes more often this winter.

### Q. What advice would you give to people looking to buy a boat or get into sailing?

A. Smaller boats are WAYWAYWAY more realistic unless you want to have a job and never go anywhere. Expect it to be lots of difficult work, it is a big commitment and you may have to let some of your other commitments slide. It will also be enormously satisfying when you are solving your own problems and mastering new skills. You will never ever know what it feels like to be "bored" again because there will always be something you should be dealing with. Also be patient with yourself and allow yourself time to learn the ropes and get the boat right before promising epic adventures to your friends. I know for me I actually traveled a lot less after I got a boat, especially for the first few years. But I also have a home now and feel good about that. And the travelling I DO do is interesting and feels like accomplishment.

### Q. What kind of opportunities does sailing open for you? The sea and sailing are often incredibly romanticized, what truth and contrast do you find in the cultural myth of sailing as freedom?

A. I rarely get to travel. I can't afford to fly to the city I grew up in and hang out there; it would take years of planning and sailing if I ever wanted to visit Thailand. I have to fly away from my boat and home to go to work four months a year now to support myself for the rest of the year. When I'm home (on *Drummer*) I spend several months just doing projects on the boat, not really traveling. On the other hand, when the projects are done I can take my friends out to remote reefs where we hang out for days in our underpants eating coconuts and spearfishing. We sail a lot. I bring my bike everywhere with me. Never drive cars anymore. Or pay rent, really. It's okay.

### Q. A lot of us come from an anti-authoritarian perspective. How do your politics fit into your life as a sailor?

A. My politics have gotten fuzzy over the years. I don't feel like I have been living what I believe for a while now. That's as much cause I'm getting old as cause the boating lifestyle opened the doors to way more consumption and buying of production goods. I have been induced and seduced into participating in capitalism in a way I didn't before. It used to be that everything I owned came from the trash. Since I got a boat, I've needed so many more things and I got impatient waiting for them to all come in the trash. So, I learned how to make money and how to spend it. I got hooked on it. As a result of that, I'm now participating in a whacked out global economy that sustains and encourages environmental degradation, human inequality, and oppression more so than I ever did before. That was the answer to the question about my politics... which are not strictly

with other inexperienced punks on boats with mixed genders. Before I owned my own boat I had never tried to integrate myself into any kind of “normal” or professional hierarchy on a boat. I launched myself into boating in a universe I had designed for myself with very little room for anyone to tell me I was doing things wrong. The little guidance I have had I intentionally sought out and found in women, or open-minded men. Often as not, I thrashed around without guidance; this means that I have learned most things the difficult way, or still haven’t learned them. But it also means no one got a chance to shoot me in the feet before I even got started, at least on a gender basis. As a result, over the last four years we’ve sailed aboard *Drummer* as a group of all women, and as mixed groups of women and men. There have been some absolute disasters in terms of crew dynamics, but still little or no precedent for gender based boat roles. Each group was made of complex individuals whose power structures and roles within the group were far more likely to get sorted out based on experience or force of personality, rather than gender. At least that’s what it looked like from where I stood.

The boat I’m working on this summer is starting to have a different feel. I am supposed to be deckhand and cook, but somehow I seem to be mostly cook and maid. There are a number of reasons this is happening, not the least of which is my newness on this boat and, having just arrived. I’m the bottom rung on a fairly normal totem-pole of seniority (for the record, this was not the case on the last boat I worked on). On the boat I’m working on now there is arguably more crew on the boat than are needed for the amount of chores. Still, I find myself feeling flustered and useless each time I am shouldered out of the way because a task requires wrenches or lifting something heavy. I am not the type to force myself into a situation that already has too many hands involved so I step back and go into the galley and bake something. I suppose this may not be the right reaction, but I prefer not to be in the way, even when it involves watching a group of men solve a simple mechanical problem in the most complicated roundabout way. The result has been that I don’t think the captain even knows I know how wrenches work.

How does this make me feel? Out of my element? Identity-less? I have never felt specifically disparaging towards cooks or maids, and I’m somewhat proud of myself for taking this job and learning a bit about cooking and cleaning, two things I had never put much energy into before. But each time the captain or engineer introduces me to someone and says “she’s a good cook” I get upset and insecure, why don’t they say “she’s a good deckhand?” Or “fisher?” They can’t tell people I am a good wrench or welder, because they don’t know. I step aside when these things need done so I’m to blame for that. I can’t say whether my role on this boat is a result of the social gender roles embedded in the captain and engineers minds (both of whom I like and respect, by the way) or are the result of my own absorbed gender roles and resulting unwillingness to interject myself in situations where they assume I’m not experienced. Do they think I’m not a good deckhand? Am I not a good deckhand? And does it matter? This is just a job. I’ll do it for a few months, learn a bunch of new stuff, and may or may not come back next year. When I get home again I’ll work on being a good captain. I’ll begin by trying to hold up my end on the cooking and cleaning better, which until now I have tended to let fall to others. I’ll try to help and encourage (or

a commitment to each other. At first we were completely overwhelmed; every experience was new and incredibly difficult. Looking back we did some things that any seasoned sailor would find ridiculous and indefensible, yet our fear and caution prevented us from getting into anything we could tell would be dangerous (although we got into some dangerous situations we couldn’t predict). “They were simpler times,” as they say, and our ignorance was often blissful. Interpersonally we operated as a group of close friends with radical values. We made decisions together, shared responsibilities, and worked alongside each other while having adventures. We all had to go onto land for a spell to attend to various responsibilities and commitments, but for that spring and summer we spent most of our time together on our boat.

What made this format unique compared to the ones that came after it is that we were coming from similar places. None of us had spent time on living on boats or knew much of anything about sailing. I was the most experienced at the time, having raced on dinghies and putzed around in day-sailers in the past two years. We all were coming from a perspective of collective ownership as well, which meant if something broke or a problem came up we were all equally invested. This parallels with the beginning of many land projects and collectives: the original team is committed, equally invested, and similarly experienced. In the ideal we learn together, teach each other, and share the stress and hardships of our projects together. We supported each other through these learning curves and difficult situations. Once an official noticed my friend didn’t have an engine aboard and asked “What do you do in case of an emergency?” the response from my friend was, “Owning a boat is one big emergency.” The reality of that can be shared by anyone who has worked on a project, especially one with mechanical needs, that is constantly in a state of disrepair. We owned a 29ft 37yr old boat, it had problems beyond our understanding and we were creating more the more we used it. The fact that we were friends who supported each other was invaluable. Having context for each other’s lives and pasts, along with trusting each other with our weaknesses and needs in a way you do with someone who has been and will be with you, is a really special thing that I find irreplaceable. I, like many others, can’t easily put my needs out there. Often times I wonder if another person knows me well enough to understand, has been privy to the nuances of my life to contextualize the situation, or even honestly cares in the first place. Working with people I’ve known for years and felt emotionally close to allowed us to share these burdens in a way that was supportive to each other. We were able to open up, to be more vulnerable. I’ve said before I want to be opening up as I age, not hardening up, this format was conducive to that growth.

So what happened? Love. The two other folks I owned the boat with had the remnants of a failed relationship that came out more and more as the trip continued. After a particularly harrowing voyage to NYC, they split and one of them left. The person who had initially bought in with me, who was also the most capable in the realm of mechanics/carpentry and a man, stayed. Later on that fall, we stopped in Rhode Island and my boat-mate fell in love with a long-time friend. He sailed twice afterwards, but the gap in experience and responsibility was growing by the day, complimented with the reality that his commitments had changed. The dissolve only happened slowly by my perception. I, like an estranged lover, thought he’d be in next time, or come back for the future voyages,

but the reality of when things needed to be fixed and bought and how that fell on myself alone cemented that the original crew had dissolved.

### The First Crew Minus-One Plus-Some

It didn't die quickly though. As most relationships, the breakup was long, full of confusion, and arduous. When our third left, we were up against operating a boat as a duo, an unappealing and daunting reality. The work load didn't diminish and the boat didn't break at a slower pace just because we had lost someone. Part of the reason I wanted a boat was to share it, and the experiences, with my friends. While I do enjoy the solo voyage here and there, I felt like I was discovering something exciting and wanted my friends to be a part of it. I didn't know any friends, save one, who had sailed before on their own boat. It was an exciting prospect, and the romantic idea of sailing off into the sunset to foreign shores was something I wanted to give to as many of my friends who wanted it. I still had a lot of energy for the boat and new things. With knowledge comes responsibility, and we knew next to nothing, it was great.

For the voyages after NYC we took on good friends of ours, changing crews at different ports. The people who came with us were almost all people we had known for years, had worked with before, and at times had lived or traveled with. The boat was holding up decently and the maintenance, while it took up a lot of our time, resources, and efforts, wasn't yet overwhelming. These two factors are important and contrast later voyages. We still had the trust and communication that comes with knowing people for years closely and having the knowledge that they'll be in your life for years to come. This might not sound as important as it is, but as a person who often feels incapable and needs support often, it was. For the boat maintenance, there's a saying that for every day at sea you'll have one thing break. When a line snaps it's a much different situation than say, your steering mechanism giving out. The problems of the first year fell more into the former example. Also, we were in the USA at this point, which allowed us access to resources and support that wasn't available to us in later voyages (as in, you can't check a forum on a deserted island, or return something to West Marine). The needs of the boat at this point were manageable, and while we maybe didn't realize it at the time, this was a huge factor to the trips going well, everyone enjoying themselves, and us staying together.

The next trip I did without my boat-mate and with a friend. It was in the winter and down the east coast, a voyage I would avoid at all costs knowing what I know now. The dynamic was foreign and different. Before my boat-mate had been the capable one, I could always turn to him if I didn't know how to do things. I was more of a helper and my skills were in the realm of the nautical arts as opposed to say, fiberglass repair. Now I was the most experienced aboard and solely responsible for my boat. My friend was there to sail with me, and without his help there's not a chance I could have done it, but it was a much different dynamic than any I had as of yet. I was, without admitting it, the captain. I was treating the situation like an awkward amalgamation of an intentional collective with shared responsibilities despite differing ownership. I can't speak for the folks I sailed with, but perhaps it was like living with your landlord, or working for a small business. Your work benefits both of you in the immediate, but solely the owner in the long run. I'm not saying that's exclusively a negative thing, but

No, I doubt anyone could ever feel like a real owner at this point, and I doubt I could truly let go. It's possible that's why the current set up kind of works. People can feel a little invested, have fun, learn stuff, but the ultimate responsibility for the boat's operation and maintenance falls on me. Because that's clear from the get go no one usually feels disenfranchised if one of their plans or ideas doesn't work out. But it means that on top of all the learning about nuts and bolts and knots and epoxy, I have had to also learn a whole new range of social skills, communication skills, and leadership skills. Not things that come naturally to me and not something I was thinking about when I decided to buy a boat and sail off into the sunset. I have made some truly horrific mistakes, but things are getting better, and I am getting better at this stuff and so for now I'd say this is working. Though I wonder what some of the folks who have put so much time and love into the boat would say.

### Q. What lines have been set along gender and how has decision making and empowerment been effected?

A. If I am presumably writing this for people who may not know me I first have to classify or contextualize myself in some and kind of way. I am biologically and sociologically female in pretty much every way and in my early thirties. I am "girly" and far too much of my self worth comes from how I perceive myself being perceived in the minds of the men around me; I easily carry my mother and grandmothers gender roles. I apologize profusely to anyone who wanted to see me differently. I am sorry, but this is who I am. At this point in my life I'm totally okay with that.

Having said that, I am also now the captain of my own 40'schooner and I would say that gender has really not come into my decision making or power roles in my boating experience very much *at all*. I have certainly been made AWARE that I am a girl, and that my life is unconventional, but it is unconventional to live in a boatyard as a young man too so I don't really feel as though my gender changed much for me. There have certainly been entertaining instances, when flustered Central American dockmasters get confused about who is actually the Captain or Capitana. Or when crabby conservative Texan cruisers have shitty things to say about whether I have any right to interject in a conversation about impellers. But these things don't generally affect the way we live on the boat or the decisions we make, for the most part gender has nothing to do with it all. Who is to say that as a male captain I would have more confidence or more inclination to take risks? That is crazy. No one can know that. I am one complex person raised gender female, taught to think act and make decisions as a socially constructed female. But I am also the biological child of my mother and father and am currently now the sum of my more than thirty years of unique positive and negative experiences that I have had interacting with the crazy gendered world. I have never been anybody else. Socially constructed gender roles can be oppressive, but not more in boating than anywhere else, and not so for me on my boat. I fit the gender-box as well as I need to stay happy and still generally do "whatever I want."

My experiences have definitely not been typical though. Before I bought a boat I had had some experiences working in shops and male dominated construction sites, but had done very little boating or sailing. The sailing I had done was

much time and emotion already in. But it's also not like I really own her or live on her alone either. She has more friends and lovers than I do.

The thing with *Drummer* is that she has too much rig to sail safely alone and is far too big for one person to live on alone. She's too big for one person to do a good job maintaining alone and too expensive to float alone. But I'm invested now and not ready to start over on a smaller or different boat, so I keep going. My community of friends comes out to help me for free every year in the boatyard or in the swamp ticking projects off lists steadily and with ingenuity. People come teach me, learn from me, and leave a little of themselves in the boat. We go out and sail and learn. When I look around the boat I see not just what I built and broke but we all built and broke and with each repair and everywhere around the boat there are stories disguised as knots and jerry rigs. Tales of friends trying and working together, adventuring together. And so I have a true gift. *Drummer* exists as she does due to the combined efforts of dozens of people but I alone refer to her as "home" when I am away. I want to keep the companionways open always to the people who have participated and those that love her. Unfortunately, in the same way that having only a single can of paint and single brush makes the boat expand out of proportion, inviting everyone who loves her to sail makes her shrink. It's not possible for everyone who loves her and deserves inclusion to be around all the time. I have often dreamed of *Drummer* being a community boat, and in small ways she is. But for better or worse I still I retain much of the final decision making power and almost all the financial burden.

So what's the alternative? Sell the boat and start over if I meet folks or a partner I want to work with? That's a heartbreaking proposition. Shareholders? Are they only beholden to responsibility equal in size to their contribution? That's nuts.



it was a new dynamic I didn't know how to handle. My friend and I butted heads over and over, and if it weren't for our long-term friendship we wouldn't have been able to continue. I didn't know how to be captain, and more importantly I didn't **want** to be captain. Our clashes had a lot to do with how our personalities interacted, but I'm sure they were intensified by my confusion and newness to this setup.

We met with another good friend and my boat-mate for the rest of the voyage once we made it south. Basically, we had just sailed in the coldest and most trying conditions I have ever sailed in (for instance, it was 9 degrees F, 25kts, 6-8ft seas, constantly wet, and there were just two of us sailing for days on end, with sea-sickness and no self-steering) and the other two met us in sunny Florida for a warm cruise to the Dominican Republic via Bahamas; funny how that works. The trip was delayed as we waited for my boat-mate to arrive; he was pushing things back due to his commitment to his relationship, and then to logistics around the trip. While the trip went well, it was much different than ones of the past. My boat-mate missed his partner and left as soon as we got to our final port, he wanted to be part of the boat but it couldn't be balanced with his commitments back home. The two friends who were with us were good friends themselves, and being that they weren't the ones owning the boat had a very different perspective on the trip than my boat-mate and I. Basically, they were able to help when and if they wanted to, but it wasn't their responsibility. The communication divided between the two groups, and my boat-mate was tending towards moving off of the boat for good. Aside from a short few day trip years later, this was the last voyage he would go on. The next time I came to the boat after that voyage, I was alone. And even though friends would join me later, the dynamic would be drastically different. I was the most experienced and the one responsible for the boat in the end; a much different scenario than what I had signed up for initially.

The boat started having, and we started noticing, new problems that required more work during this time. The work load felt different; while people could lend a hand when and if they wanted, they weren't expected to and were working on a boat they didn't own. This was different than the previous dynamic in the way that before the people working on the boat were the people who owned it. Now it was either that the owners worked on the boat as people lived on it, or people were just helping as they wanted. This was fine when I had my boat-mate, the capable one of us two, but when I didn't I felt so overwhelmed and alone. Anyone who has been a member of a dwindling collective can relate to this; the participants decrease while the work load tends to increase. Perhaps a difference was that it was also my home and something I had to be responsible for. It isn't always the easiest to just leave a boat somewhere, and they deteriorate rather quickly even when not used. Even when I was on the west coast of the USA, thousands of miles from my boat, I checked the weather and hurricane predictions; it's always on your mind. A particular experience comes to mind where my friend and I were sewing sails in freezing temperatures for thirteen hours straight. If it gets done isn't a question, it's more of how, how well, in what time, at what expense, and with what stress it will get done.

### The Variable Crew

With the initial crew dispersed and a breaking boat in tow, what else is there

to do but continue on? Although I would still kid myself from time to time, I knew my boat-mate was out. As the experiential gap and material investments grew in a way where I was more committed to the boat, the weight of this reality increased. Coming back to the boat after several months away there was a monumental amount of work to be done, and only myself to do it. It got done, at great stress to myself, before a crew of two friends showed up. Unlike the previous two friends, these ones had never sailed before on the ocean. I could write a zine about it, but long story short both friends were sea-sick and I sailed the boat mostly solo for days in a row. I consider this my first voyage with the boat as my own. I sailed solo for a bit, then extend the opportunity to sail to my friends. Sometimes the route would be decided beforehand and I wanted help, company, and to share it with them. Other times friends would show up and we'd decide what to do and where to go from there. Everything was very informal in this front as I was sailing with friends, people I had context for and felt supported by. The work of the boat, the operation and maintenance, still fell on me and me alone.

This period lasted a while and went through various incarnations. The friend groups I drew from were farther away geographically and socially; I spent my winters down south in warmer places where I knew fewer people. My life, skill set, and interests were mostly having to do with boats and sailing. Keeping the boat going became a much larger task and I had to work hard to manage it. Most every book I read was about boats, most skills I learned were specific to boats, and a large part of my identity was entwined in sailing. Basically, I was becoming more irrelevant and un-relatable to my social scene and friend group. As I changed I started sailing with people I knew less, people who could work with my sailing schedule and were willing to travel to and from where the boat was. Also, I realized this much later, the more responsibility I had and therefore the more I was the captain of my boat, the less I wanted my long term friends to see it. I was always working on the boat, toiling and fixing things, and while that was interspersed with beautiful islands and wonderful experiences, the focus of it was on the former for me and that wasn't something I associated with my friends enjoying. I think I was uncomfortable with this responsibility, and perhaps didn't want other to be subject to it.

The boat kept on moving, and the people who sailed with me became further and further from people I knew well. People would associate me with sailing, so I would be contacted by distant friends, acquaintances, and strangers who asked to come along. I took most anyone who could meet the schedule, and aside from two exceptions took only ladies and queers. This was intentional; often ladies and queers have to put up with problematic men to go sailing, since problematic men are often the ones who own boats. I wanted to attempt to offer the resources and experience I had with folks in a way that felt like a better and more comfortable alternative. It's not the hardest thing to get a crewing position on a boat, but to find a boat that's intentionally committed against patriarchy and pro-queerness, with anarchist ideals, is a rarity. I'm not trying to say my boat was a safe-space queer anarchist utopia, far from it, but we were making attempts to make it a move livable space for everyone involved. This also wasn't a project in the activist organizers' sense, it was simply what I wanted for myself and I was attempting to hold it in the space I felt I had some control of. I was selective with

are just so happy and excited to see that, beyond all expectations, I made it; not only out of the yard, but out of Florida and into the world.

**Q. Where all has Drummer been? It seems you mostly travel doing and contributing to various projects, tell us more about those.**

A. Oh, *Drummer* is a charismatic boat. People are charmed by her; she does this thing where she can carry tons of cargo without even changing her waterline. When we first had her in the water a couple non-profit groups were fundraising to send food and medical supplies to Haiti on private yachts and we volunteered to go. The trip taught us a lot. The next year, inspired by her performance with the beans and rice, we resolved to take bicycles to the Caribbean, organizing the trip ourselves this time. It was fun but difficult and while I found it exciting and inspiring I have also found that the last couple years it has been all that I could do to keep the boat maintained and "on the go" with a crew. So, while I'd love to do more cargo type trips, I don't know if I can carry the rather large responsibility of the ship's maintenance and improvements, captaining her, AND organizing something inspiring to do with her on my own. I'd like people to come to me with ideas or proposals and be willing to bottom-line the collection and distribution at either end. So yea, if anyone's got anything exciting on the brew... hit me up. I've got a boat. She does cargo.

**Q. What future plans, hopes, or aspirations do you have for Drummer?**

A. One day. Nothing will be broken.

**Q. Having been a boat owner solo and as a part of a couple operating a boat what do you think the differences have been?**

A. Well the enormous challenge of taking on a project the size of a sailboat, or a salvage sailboat, and the enormous responsibility of owning and traveling on said sailboat are obviously spread further with a couple. Responsibility is diffused if more than one person is equally invested in the project. There are more hands to lift heavy things, pay for expensive things, solve problems, and all that. A wider range of skill-sets to draw from. Not that it's less of a challenge or less stress at all, only that the challenge for each person shifts so that instead of being all about logistics and boat hardware, the challenge only lies partly in the nuts, bolts, and finances. A whole other part about this really difficult problem is *working with others on something you're invested in*. I believe this would hold true in a situation where a boat belonged to a couple every bit as much as a situation where a boat belonged to a collective, or group of friends. The real problem here is that I don't think any two people or group of people can ever really all be equally invested in a project. That's okay, there are a lot of ways people make that work. Learning to work and cooperate with others on something that you not only care deeply about, but might also one day save your life, is every bit as much a challenge as teaching yourself to be the engineer on the boat you live on. So, for me? How do I talk about this without telling my whole life story? I live on a 40'sailboat that I own, she has been with me through almost seven years and two significant relationships. It would be essentially impossible for anyone, friend or partner, to be as equally invested in this boat as I am. I just have too

## Interview with Margaret from S/V Drummer

---

*The first time I ever saw other punks on a boat was in Georgetown Great Exuma in 2010. Coming into the harbor we saw a black and red junk-rigged schooner under sail, a pretty impressive sight. I was even more excited to see it crewed by folks with identifiable cultural markers: dreadlocks, patches, wearing all black. Margaret, the owner of said schooner, S/V Drummer, has been a huge inspiration to many sailors and wanna-be sailors throughout the years. She has participated in various projects with her boat, taken many people sailing with her, been an amazing resource of information, and helped organize the sailboat meet-up that happened in Guatemala winter 2012, to name a simple few of her contributions and participations.*

**Q. Take a minute to introduce yourself. Tell us what you're up to nowadays.**

A. Hi. I'm Margaret. I'm in Alaska at the moment working at my job, getting sick of it and dreaming of home. My home is my boat *Drummer*, where I live most of the year. Right now she is in Guatemala where I thought I could store her safely while I came to Alaska for three months, which turned into five.

**Q. How long have you been sailing and spending time on boats? Did you sail much before buying *Drummer*?**

A. I had arbitrarily decided I was going to get a sailboat while hitchhiking out of Berlin in 2003. It seemed better to have some kind of plan than not to. I did my first sailing trip with Drew and Kia on *Siddartha* in 2005. None of us knew what we were doing, it's a great story. We meandered up the inside passage for two cold and wet months from Seattle to Ketchikan having awesome adventures, successfully sailing very little. I had basically no other experiences to draw from when I went looking for my boat, finding her in a yard in shambles. I have no idea what I was thinking.

**Q. I know you put years of work into *Drummer* before it was ready to sail. What was that experience like?**

A. Living in a boatyard is a physically unhealthy and emotionally taxing experience. It was awful. We drove ourselves to work such long miserable hours and taught ourselves new skills like it was boot camp. We rarely allowed ourselves breaks to leave the boatyard or have outings, instead we made deep strong connections with the variable range of misfits that find themselves, for whatever reason, living in boatyards in the swamp. We learned so much from the people around us; they looked out for us and shared their tools and experiences. We learned and grew up. The boatyard became habit forming, the list of things that needed to be done got continually longer instead of shorter. I often realized I'd wasted weeks or months on some irrelevant project, doing something in the wrong way or with the wrong materials. Money poured out of our hands and pockets until we didn't feel it anymore, much of it wasted in our inexperience on pointless, stupid, or gimmicky materials. In the end almost every project we did in those first few years has been or will need to be redone at some point. I suppose that's the nature of learning. The reward comes when I run into some weird cruising couple down south who recognize me or the boat from those days and

the people I sailed with, although to varying extents depending on the factors involved, and with that bias I hoped we'd be trying to create and hold similar spaces.

This was an interesting setup for me. Imagine a collective house/piece of land that you owned where the only other residents were travelers and guests. On top of that, you all were always working on projects that depended on group problem-solving and decision making, although most of the skills needed were held partially, mostly, or solely by yourself. To top it off, your land is 29' long, has no privacy, tips and rolls, needs constant watch and maintenance, and makes about half the people who step aboard sick when it moves in the hostile environment you're in. At this point there was no question over who owned the boat and who was ultimately responsible; the folks sailing with me were welcome and necessary guests. I've been in both positions on boats, owner and crew, and for me the biggest difference is while crewing the feelings of responsibility for the boat aren't looming overhead. I always say nothing on the boat is "fixed" or "working," it's simply "not broken right now" or "working at the moment." I'd always be thinking of the weak points of my boat and what was going to break next. The positive side of this was that when things did break or go sour, I typically had ideas for how to handle it, being that I had been worrying about the situation for quite some time already; the negative being that most of my time was spent worrying. That was one of the most stressful factors, and one that is much more pressing for an owner.

A captain, as with most every sailor, is often also functioning as a teacher. Sometimes formally, sometimes informally, but most sailors are always eager to learn more either from the sailors around them, the volumes written about sailing, their own experiments, or their own observations. Being that a lot of folks who sailed with me were looking to gain knowledge and experience about boats and sailing, this was another factor to navigate. To be clear, one of the joys for me of having a boat is sharing the knowledge and experience I had accumulated. There are as many ways of learning as there are people, so it was sometimes a struggle of learning how to share. I learned how to sail by researching, taking risks, and analyzing. I still think one of the best ways to learn the fundamentals of sailing is to get a dinghy then flip it over and run it into things until it all starts to make sense. Obviously not everyone learns this way and some people want more formal guidance. It complicates when people want or need to learn by mistakes and errors on a boat you're ultimately responsible for. A lot of us have had a situation similar, where we try to do something to help a friend who could do a better job than us and we fail. As I got to know the boat and its systems more intimately, and most importantly how fragile every aspect of the boat actually was, I became less permitting of mistake oriented learning as I feared the work load that I could incur from another's mistake. The folks sailing with me were always helpful with repairs, improvements, and work on the boat. Almost always we were lucky enough to have someone skilled in whatever department we were working with (sewing, fiberglass, carpentry, metalworking, electronics, engine mechanics, etc) amongst us, yet that fear rooted in final responsibility became paralyzing for me. What this looked like is sometimes when someone would want to take a risk to learn from I sometimes shut it down. At times the risk wouldn't be apparent, or perhaps there wasn't a real risk, only one I perceived. I felt like a little black rain

cloud, making sure no parades happened on my boat. Formal teaching worked at times, but sometimes I hadn't had the time or energy for that either.

There are so many skills that go into running a voyage. Sometimes after a multiple hundred mile voyage folks would know how to trim sails, steer a course, and read the lights of another vessel but haven't an idea of how to navigate, read the weather, work the radio, or even sing a proper sea shanty. It was disappointing for me and the crew, we all wanted a voyage and sailing to be a healthy learning environment where people felt fulfilled by the experience. A large factor in this was I didn't have the energy or emotional health to foster a healthy learning environment. I was incredibly lucky to have able and knowledgeable sailors with me who would teach each other, I can't describe the relief and joy it brought me to see someone else fielding questions or taking the lead on showing someone how to do something. Every gardener or farmer has to share their knowledge with the excited bushy-tailed visitor eager to help and knows navigating this on top of the stress of maintaining and managing your space can be asking for quite a lot. I kept this format up for three years, before I felt I was suffering as a teacher and captain to the point I and the people sailing with me weren't having good experiences. I sold my boat to take a break and time to breathe. After lots of conversations about these dynamics, with more to come, I hope I'm able to own a boat and take people out sailing again in a way that feels good to all parties. To put it frankly, I couldn't take the responsibility anymore and wasn't fostering the experience we all deserved.

Some of the people who came sailing with me at this point I had never met, and didn't know past a few emails or phone conversations, while some I had hung out with a few times casually. Regardless, most everyone was from a radical subculture and we shared some of the same norms in this way. It was helpful that everyone came from a place critical of patriarchy, the state, and had what I consider at least a base level of radical principles. We discussed most decisions we made, either for how to make what decision or to discuss why a decision was made. Experience with consensus and collective operating was very helpful, along with a focus on general communication dynamics. Still, just because you're on a boat together and a radical doesn't mean you'll operate well together. Collectives work on the basis that you respect and like the people you're working with. As I didn't know most of the people who came sailing with me beforehand very well or at all, they often didn't know each other. Typically, I invited someone I knew somewhat or decently, then someone I knew less and they brought a friend; I felt this worked decently. Most people could work and live together, being "team players" even if they didn't get along with each other that well. Operating with an assumed informal collective of four strangers can be quite difficult, imagine twelve.

### Flotzilla

After a few years at sea I started to meet a few other punks on the water. We would run into each other and discuss plans but often times things didn't line up. From these networks myself and another person decided to hold a meet-up of punk/radical/DIY sailors in Guatemala the next winter, and that my boat would travel with another boat down to said meet-up. The progression for me was similar to traveling alone, then with a travel partner, then with a group of travelers.

received more unsolicited advice than you bargained for? Many love to hear themselves speak and sweat power from their wagging tongues. Often the question has not been answered but the inquirer received an earful without interruption. Silence is not always complacency, but the sleep of swords. A demur, stepping back from the one-sided conversation... You: afraid of challenge to your righteous ideas and myself worried of another longwinded story only to end in how I should not consider trying or another typical effrontery to my short-comings.

*My crew and hauled anchor and sailed out of Beaufort, North Carolina and we're all very new to sailing. The two of them had never been out in blue water or the 25-30 knots of wind or eight foot following seas. I gave little trust in my crew members. Our lives were not threatened but I really wish I had acted accordingly. The darkness overtook the vessel and the moon, recently waning, plump and bright. The winds begin to pick up and the ocean swells from the east create deeper troughs. We are running downwind and seem to cascade down the other side. We are calm and in control then, bam, accidental gibe and the sail rips. I rush to the tiller and take it with little explanation. And bring the sail down by myself because I do not give a chance for others to step forward or use their abilities. No learned tactical maneuvers or skills from my rashly made decisions. I have shown that I did not trust their abilities, possibly stifling a crew member's chance to learn. It becomes difficult to trust one another and the only way to combat this mythos is to foster confidence in one another. I go back to this moment and others where I wonder what I gained from not giving a space or opportunity to try anything. People must be given a chance to try and often they find a better or more efficient way to the same end. Who cares about the mistake that could be made, lest it involve a life/death situation? There is value in walking away from the situation having learned it in a more trying manner. Even if we believe it may work or not we need the experience for growth.*

For queers is the draw toward landlessness representative to molding their lives with their own hands? One way to restore my mental health I can move and use my body in ways that are not as safe on land. I recall many situations and crews that I have been fortunate enough to sail without clothes and my body is not sexualized. We can all feel comfortable and safe within our own bodies. Leaving land, choosing to be without, assists my mental state. The direct relationship to the wind comforts me. The learning process is incalculable when there is the simple union of nature and human and there is always a lot to be learned. I have the privilege to remove myself from the monotonous, mediating lifestyle of the given structures of society. Without land security we lose the means for self-produced goods and favorable usage of time and energy unless used towards patriarchal ends but owning land one must abide by the laws. Owning or sailing a boat you have created a temporary zone of autonomy where we make decisions for ourselves. Freedom of movement through borders, states, and accepted realities is still restricted by many factors including our own limiting nature.

*I was picked up by another sailor and of course the conversation moved towards sailing. He says to me, "You are gluttonous for pain, then..." I responded "Of course, and sailing is that outlet!" I am attracted less to the 'pains' of sailing but the challenges it presents and the constant work it takes to create what I want to see happening out on the water. And yes it is difficult and I sail to talk about these dynamics, for all these factors are intrinsic to what I see as the aesthetics of sailing and seamanship.*

*the radicals, anarchists, and punks to convene on this small town for a conference of sorts. We came to sail and learn what we could in those seven days. I was fortunate enough to stumble on a gorgeous vessel named Pleiades. This Clorox bottle was headed back to the states; another 800 mile journey lay ahead. An unplanned, yet inevitable, boat family was to be created. Three boats, twelve freaks, and many lessons pertaining to our voluntary family unit and the dynamics involved bring me to a part of my life I've found passion for. This adventure alone led me to finding a community of folks ready to share their spaces and lives for adventure and challenges the future presented. Maine to Florida, Bahamas and back and Cuba, multiple crew changes, intense passages, communication breakdowns and the unlikely position of skippering, I'm nowhere near fluent in sailing; this is a life-long process in parallel to the lifestyle I choose to lead.*

I am not looking for equality. I am seeking peers, teachers, learners who are willing to meet at a personal level, yourself and I, wondering at the ocean as two people who both have different needs and desires, remembering we have experienced life in ways that are similar, and many that are wholly different and unrecognizable unless we open ourselves to each other's sensitivities, possibilities, and are prepared to listen and learn from one another.

*Beaufort, North Carolina. Noah's Ark previous owner and father to the captain, L. Packard. She left NA in my care and before I depart for the rolling heap I must relinquish charts and various borrowed gear. This man possesses extensive knowledge of blue water sailing, outboard/engine maintenance, and has gained much through his many years of experience as an able-bodied seaman. He retains knowledge of celestial navigation but denounces the idea of learning the basics at my request. Like many before him he tells me, "Useless information, we have GPS to find our way..." After tactful pleading he relinquishes a brief lesson as if he was reminding his hunting buddy how to reload his gun safely "...of course, so simple, right?" "Okay, but..." We push forward. He demonstrates how to change the oil of our outboard motor. We sit around NA's cockpit but before we commence with what I could already gather was to be much less of the learning experience I was hoping for, I ask that we wait for another crew member saying we should all be able to maintain parts of the boat. A lesson begins, she arrives late. Later, we commiserate about how he only made direct eye contact with our male crew, shying away. This club is exclusive and I am unworthy of secrets within those walls, an outsider view of male affirmations of a seemingly vindictive nature that the rest of us are privileged to set down near. To top it all off as we were about to set off he threw our dock lines without us knowing or ready and yells, "safe travels!" and we scramble around foolishly in a small channel with strong currents.*

Authority is a profound comprehension pulled from one's ass and often used oppressively. Authority silences and disregards the possibility of compromise, asking questions, debate, or disagreement. To have an inerrable understanding is to not value other's experiences, a self-proclaimed superiority over competing ideas. There has been many a time where I spoke of unfounded facts as if I knew what I was talking about and quickly realized my own follies. I must learn to humble myself in similar situations and have enough courage to ask when I do not know. Authoritative powers and queerness are not compatible. I define my queerness as a fluid part of a whole and maintain agency over myself and no one else. I am not diseased, I am not incapable, and I have my weaknesses but one cannot assume what they may be. I try to be open to change, not restrict my movements, and make my own mistakes. How many times have you asked for assistance and

Now we would be making decisions not only with each other, but with another boat full of individuals who, most of the time, we didn't know. As things progressed, the number of boats traveling together expanded, and with it the people involved. The other boats I traveled with had similar dynamics as mine: they were owned by a single owner and had a rotating cast of crew. For my friends the story had been similar in that the longer they sailed, the less they were sailing with their previous friends and started sailing with people they knew less and less. I don't want to paint the picture that we were all just sailing with whoever was at the dock, I'm stating that for myself and a few of my friends we sailed more often with people we knew a little "from the scene" or as friends of friends and less with the people we had known for long portions of our lives.

When a few boats sail together it's sometimes called a flotilla. Being that all our boats looked somewhat trashy (apologies to my friends that might offend), were always occupied by more persons than other boats (most every boat sailing is crewed solo or by a couple, we were four or five per boat), full of wacky looking young persons, and often times pulling risky or daring maneuvers (sailing without a motor for instance), we were a formidable presence. Hence, the Flotzilla. You could say we brought life into a harbor, having multiple boats tied together with people jumping off the spreaders (half-way up the mast), laughing during giant dinners, and working on projects together. You could just as easily say we trashed up the harbors, being the kind of neighbors that lower your property value.

The pleasure of sailing with our friends added some factors to navigate. For instance, when we discussed where we wanted to go, we had as many as twelve persons with all their desires and needs to factor in; persons who might have very different and directly conflicting desires, on top of perhaps not liking or respecting each other. The characters associated with each boat varied as well. We had our little cliques, and we all had to work together. To be fair, we didn't have to work together or do anything together, but we wanted to stay together. "Never break up the raft" became the mantra and the motivator for all kinds of bad decisions. For a short example, we wanted to leave one port for another port. To catch the correct tide and go early enough to avoid heavy weather predicted later, we would have to leave at dark. One boat didn't want to leave at dark, so we left at first light, fighting the current out of the first port for quite some time. We were sailing with light, but didn't make it to our destination before the heavy weather hit. All three boats made it to port, but all three boats sustained damage from the conditions we were in, causing one boat to drop out of the voyage. These are the kinds of compromises that come up; people had needs and desires that directly conflicted with each other so we tried to work solutions that worked for everyone. They're usually shadows of what anyone wants, or sometimes they're what one wants and the rest feel they can accommodate. For contrast, countless times we made decisions that we were all happy with and could get behind, but the roadblocks and bumps stand out more to me, often because they were more trying and had more of an impact.

We benefited from each other's company greatly. Working on projects became much easier as we were able to share the skills and tools we all had. With all the folks involved the base of knowledge and experience grew greatly. Plus, radicals

and punks usually like to roll deep, and while it's harder to discuss the merits of being surrounded by friends, they're the reason a lot of us go through the troubles of collectives and groups. Often you could find people to go on your little adventures with you, help you fix something, learn something together, get your jokes, or just help row you to shore and back if you wanted time apart. You were also more likely to have a friend somewhere in the group. Being at times we didn't know each other well, it could be a lonely time traveling with three or more boats full of people. With more persons you'd often found solace in someone, or in the group dynamic. We would go on family vacations together, all go diving together, and help meet each other's needs when we could. Perhaps Manson-esque, we did at times refer to our group as "the family."

### The 2012 DIY Sailboat Meet-up

In winter of 2012 in Rio Dulce Guatemala myself and a few others organized a meet-up of radical/punk sailors. Seven boats came with an estimate of fifty other persons in attendance. The idea behind this was as simple as any other meet-up of any other interest or subculture. We wanted to meet each other and do things together. When planning said meet-up we didn't really have a clear idea of what it would look like. Perhaps a few grumpy sailors would show up and we'd all work on each other's boats, then maybe sail somewhere. As time progressed and the emails about interest and attendance starting coming in we started to get an idea of what it was going to look like. Most attendees were people excited about sailing without much experience, hoping to learn more. We geared the meet-up in a format we knew well, workshops and skill-shares with social events in-between. Overall this event was a success with people learning lots of new skills, having interesting discussions, and spending time sailing on boats. A further write-up and analysis of the event was written and posted online, for more information on the event itself.

The most positive thing that came from the meet-up in my opinion was connecting the attendees. Most of us hadn't met before, and the few that had became closer because of the meet-up. Afterwards many of us sailed with each other through the informal friend networks we had established. A few of us have been writing, supporting, and promoting each other's projects through web-sites, listservs, and showing up to help. I like to feel that I'm part of a group, or subculture, and the meet-up did well to service this. The day before the meet-up started I was worried we'd only be a few people, that there weren't actually as many radicals interested in sailing as I had hoped. From the people I met there and through those connections I feel like there are a lot of us. While just being a punk and into sailing isn't valuable in itself, I do enjoy feeling less alone in my interests and lifestyle and the meet-up brought me in proximity with some folks I related to. I'm married to the sea, as they say, so it's exciting to find other people that I feel affinity with who are as well. I'm hoping that interested folks can find a way to live a life at sea together in a way that's more fulfilling. The meet-up was a good example of a form this could take, along with the Flotzilla, but the connections made offer the possibility of new ideas and formats yet to be seen. As new people and new ideas get brought into closer proximity with each other I have hope for experiments to launch, new forms to take shape, and new possibilities to blossom.

## Untitled *by Emory Rotten emoryemory@riseup.net*

The sea courses through these veins. Born of the Pacific islands and adopted to a coastal Maine family of mariner and farmer descent. Brought involuntarily to the east coast at a mere 16 months, I am still learning to deal with certain traumas. I have no connection to a blood-related family. I can see no records or hear stories of aunts, uncles, great grandparents. I have no access to medical records and I slowly tread the waters of possible health issues and addiction. I am creating my own history. My adopting family has a history but it is one I cannot call my own. I could point out places while we drive up and down the coast of Maine and refer you to my mother's extensive genealogical research. It becomes distressing when I realize my own grand sense of displacement from a Filipino community, white Maine community, the white punk community, and white sailing community, will always be present. I will never be white enough nor brown enough. So I attempt to seek an outlet anywhere, traveling by sailing has filled a void of sorts. The places I inhabit become the product of my dislocation. At the very least, I can manage to gain from the valuable experience.

Sailing becomes the most recent arena to provide understanding to certain dynamics, beginning at the basic forms of survival to the more radically possible ideas. After the basic everyday appeasement to the stomach and shelter from the barrage of ever changing elements, sailing provides space for dialogue on the particulars of radical ideas. Certain understandings of myself have arisen to be repeatedly scrutinized, challenged, critiqued. The ocean succeeds at supplying situations of vigorously involved awareness of one's surroundings, whether it is one's crew or how the vessel responds to variable winds and currents. Much can be learned in a small space with run on thoughts and cramped quarters. Dynamics exist and when in a confined space with four people there is only so much space to maneuver. From land to sea we are still dealing with the same processes and the acknowledgement of them through discourse and action are a part of the process to understanding and ultimately respect.

We are limitless and indefinable, always evolving and malleable but to make life easier I am an adopted child of a white, middle class family, born in the Philippines and raised in Maine. My voluntary and actively sought out experience led me to delinquency, punk, gender deviance, under the over arching emphasis of freakiness. The involuntary part of me is brown and able to pass as a male. Within the sailing world a person like me is rarely seen. Still, women are rarely spoken of for their accomplishments, underestimated and overshadowed by an army of sailing men in the racing culture. From what I've gathered from visiting cruisers' boats the often tilted, moving home space provokes questioning of domestic roles. Other times it just carries over that people are enacting what they learn on land. As a community of outsiders, deviants, and the fringe who at times are searching for the means to create some semblance of autonomy or surround ourselves with supportive friends and environs, I'm excited to see the liberating space of the ocean become another place to empower one another and challenge ideas.

*In February 2012, after the annually rushed winter plans I arrived at Fronteras, where the Rio Dulce rushes through Pueblo and winds through lush, tropical foliage to the Caribbean waters. A call-out was delivered by correspondence, email, and word of mouth to*

other than jumping in and figuring it out, which, in this case, involves both navigating the boat and the social relationships of experience, ownership, and friendships. On the whole, looking back at the dynamics created by this structure, I have no major regrets about any of the trips I've taken or about boat-related decisions I've made up to, and including, selling my boat. But moving forward, I won't repeat this pattern. To the extent that the folks I sailed with succeeded in creating something we wanted to be involved in, a dynamic consistent with our values, a community in which we could learn from each other across gaps of experience and privilege, we did so despite the structures we set up for ourselves. A better model is needed. What that would look like, I'm not sure. More structure for learning? Better availability of beater-boats to practice on? More formal, intentional cooperation between boats? Or, fewer, bigger, collectively-owned boats? A physical space to foster community, an actual Anarchist Yacht Club?

- **Share some closing thoughts on these topics.**

**Saiya:** I think that as long as we, as sailors who are also trying to rewrite the ways that boats are operated, keep these discussions open, our experiences will become more rich and our ability to teach and support each other will gain strength. We need to keep ourselves committed to respect, mutual aid and support, explore unabashed resistance and fun, and be willing to own our mistakes and grow from them. If we stick together and work on our shit, we can do incredible things.

**Emory:** I am anxious to see the dissemination from the normalities of the last 40 years on the water and watch the evolution of a community at large. I feel a pressing desire to continually engage in conversation about sailing and all the possibility and opportunity it holds for the radical sailor. I want to see these innovative ideas we have around community put into practice. Crew dynamics expand and change. Nothing we hold is purely true or based in fact, right or wrong. Constantly I become more aware how my realities and self-truths are shattered, rebuilt, refined over and over. How do we push the envelope, our boundaries? We are limitless and indefinable creatures. One way I imagine a translation of this looks like an evolution of a sailing microcosm and we will create what we want to see and tread new paths to possible outcomes.

**Jen:** I believe that on a longer passage it is totally possible and desirable to rotate responsibilities like course plotting, sail configuration, monitoring the batteries, inspecting the rigging, meal preparation, docking, etc. I'm not so drawn to things like chore wheels and have seen really wonderful consideration and attentiveness develop fairly organically, or at least with a little prodding. I believe that most people who are reading this have some background in thinking and working in non-hierarchical and anti-oppressive realms but sailing (which I now realize I haven't mentioned is awesome and possibly the best thing ever--for the record) can be very stressful and all of us ought to be vigilant in trying not to fall into typical, structured roles, either as captain or crew or however it is we perceive ourselves. I'm sure we've all thought about this a lot and I apologize if I've been pointing out the obvious, but I also see how hard it can be for folks with great politics to maintain them on the daily and in such close quarters. It's a project we're working on, so let's keep working on it.

### **Your Boat could be your Land Project**

I sold my boat earlier this year. The Flotzilla was the final incarnation of "my boat as my land project" for me. To narrow it down to one factor, it was the stress that did me in. To expand, it was keeping up with the maintenance of the boat, working with everyone's schedules, working with everyone's learning dynamics, navigating the problematic dynamics we had and how they worked with the group, the financial burdens, lacking confidence, lacking feedback, lacking people I felt close with around me, the loneliness, the problematic aspects of the culture around sailing, and the alienation from my former social context, to name a few. Currently I'm playing "not my boat" and sailing with my friends, learning how other people operate their ships and what they're trying for. I plan on getting another boat in the future, with new ideas and formats in mind.

Like any proper daydreamers, we all spend a good bit of time talking about what else we'd like to see happen around radical sailing; what other formats it could take that might avoid some of the pitfalls we experienced. There are many other folks out there engaged in all kinds of radical projects at sea and on the water (the Seasteading Institute, Swimming Cities, Ephemerisle, to name very few) worth examining, but the two most popular ideas that I've discussed and heard amongst my friends are owning a large vessel collectively, and owning a marina/boatyard. These are both full of the predictable problems associated with any collective, especially with collective ownership.

In our dreams we have a large sailboat, say a three masted schooner, which has a core body of owners with rotating visitors. I'm the only boat-owner that I've known that has attempted to own a boat with another person who wasn't my romantic partner, and this idea doesn't seem that different than with what I attempted. Sure, my experience fell apart and perhaps it could succeed with more intention and commitment, but as anyone who has been part of any long-term collective or land ownership knows things depending on social bonds are likely to fall apart. Sailing attracts the traveling types and although sailing boats are ideally moving vessels, we're a type plagued by transience, the bane of collectives. An idea around all of this would be a finite life span. Boats tend to sell easier than land and houses in my experience, so hopefully the sole owner of the dead collective dynamic would be less likely of an outcome. Last winter we sailed alongside two young people who bought a boat, sailed it through the Bahamas and sold it in Dominican Republic. They had a wonderful time and I think part of it was having an idea of when and how things should end. Folks talk about this setup in the format of having a core body of owners and including more people when the boat is moving and being operated. Having worked on tall-ships in the past with formal roles and hierarchies, I can see merits to this structuring (ships have operated this way for centuries) although I feel care is needed to navigate it in a way that could be fulfilling and not simply convenient or smooth. With anything, I like to explore in ways where we're striving towards what we want, not simply what we can manage. I don't want this to come across nay-saying, but I do fear the bigger the boat the bigger the budget and problems. Plenty of people have been in port for years and years working on their dream boats, the dream dying as the workload increases.

Because I don't have direct experience with it, the idea of owning a marina/boat-

yard sounds appealing. Ownership has an appealing sound to it, but honestly just reliable access and ability to consistently use the space would suffice. I dream of a space where we could host sailing clinics and teach sailing skills consistently. One of my largest desires with sailing is sharing all this specialized knowledge and experience that I've spent years of my life accumulating with interested folks. We could learn from each other and learn together. A space would give us a social base, something that people traveling often don't have, yet desire. It could function as a literal "home base;" a place to return to, and a place to feel a part of. Often times we find ourselves anchored out in the small enclaves of freedom we can haggle within ugly sailing ports, our friends far away in towns without viable anchorages or without proper access via the water. I've spent months only an hour away from a town I'd like to be in simply because the option of living on your boat was so much easier in a miserable nearby port. When the Flotzilla would park somewhere, we claimed our own space for a spell, but were still subject to all the rules and customs of the area. I've been harassed by police, coast guard, homeland security, fish and wildlife services, and marina or anchorage managers, to name a few of the officials that patrol the waterways. While owning a space you're still subject to many of these, but often to a lesser extent and perhaps in ways where you have more agency.

The most exciting futures are the ones I can't imagine. They're the ones that seem so otherworldly that I'd shoot them down upon mention, yet offer radical potential that I couldn't ever foresee. Once we sent a call out for sailors to meet up at this abandoned hotel on an island in the Bahamas. Many people showed interest, but in the end only two overloaded boats were able to make it. We had a wonderful time; we had reefs, beaches, and a gigantic building to ourselves alone for the time we were there. There were ways it felt comfortable, yet we knew it was just a stop in a trip. I wonder what it would take to maintain a desire to work to keep a place like that. I'd like to take more experiments and hear about other people's attempts to create an intentional life at sea. My hopes are that we can hold community in a way that supports each other in our outlandish endeavors, with support in direct and indirect ways through our channels of subculture and interest. Many of us go out to sea to escape the norms of society, so why would we want to uphold and recreate them in our lives on the oceans? I encourage and push folks to try to create the things they want to see, and in absence of a clear vision of what that looks like attempt experiments in a radical direction along with attempting to form space away from society to start thinking and actualizing the potential of what we could have. There's a growing community of radical sailors who want to support each other in these attempts, so I hope we're able to reach out to each other and see what we can do.

**Morgan:** All of the boats I've spent serious time on or made passages on have been very similar. They've all been 26'-30' fiberglass hulls, they've all been over 30 years old and therefore in various states of disrepair and borderline under-equipped for the passages we made in them. They've all been owned by one person but sailed with a crew of 3 or 4, and usually with 1 or 2 other boats. I've only sailed with people I'd consider my community, a fact with both pros and cons. Within this context, I've been both crew and owner, both the person looking to someone to tell me what to do, and the person everyone is looking at to tell them what to do. With so many people involved, decision making at a high level is typically made by the boat owners or a smaller group of folks who create a rough schedule that everyone else plugs into, for example, saying that we're leaving Miami on December 1st, sailing in the Keys for a while, and arriving in Mexico by February 1st. Crew then coordinates to sail for a while here or there, get off at a certain point, get on somewhere else, and so on. On a more immediate level, there is opportunity and willingness to discuss plans that fit within this larger schedule, but wildly different levels of information, experience, participation, and investment, and thus, often, the significance of decisions, or even that an action has options, is unclear. I've seen minor points discussed at great length and major tactical choices made without discussion; I've sailed with a dozen people at a time with only person getting up to listen to the weather, and sailed hundreds of miles before I looked at my first chart.

From the perspective of crew in this dynamic, I often felt I was leaping off into the unknown, having no idea what to expect – how long we would be at sea, in what conditions, etc. As owner, I felt the crazy anxiety of attempting to pilot everything I own through narrow unmarked cuts as my nav aids and auxiliary power systems gradually fall apart. And, as a fleet, we become a herd of kittens, all wandering off, following our own random interests with only the dinghies and the schedule as organizing principles. The end result for me has been de facto rigid adherence to a schedule that was created of arbitrary dates far in advance to facilitate crew changes, and a pretty clear division between crew and owner as it relates to agency, responsibility, and investment. A schedule gets made, the owners try to keep the boat safe, and crew does their watch and tries to help out with maintenance to greater and lesser extents. None of this, to me, seems malicious or deliberately manipulative or anything of the sort, but as an uneasy compromise born of several inequalities: that one person owns the boat (almost always owns only the boat) and sails all the time, that others hop on here or there for shorter fixed times and don't have their life and home tied up in the boat, and that sailing is fun and, well, seems fun – like a social event rather than a formal meeting or project, and therefore has little emphasis on process.

When corresponding about our "fleet," S from DA once made an offhanded comment about our lack of intention, and I to this day can think of no better way of summarizing my past couple years of sailing. The dynamic of the sailing I've done so far as been informal to a fault, lacking intention. The positive of this is how accessible it makes sailing – it's unlikely that I'd have started sailing if it wasn't for these informal connections, and I feel very lucky to be part of such an inspiring community. On the other hand, the informality means that, in my experience, there just hasn't been any structure for folks "looking to learn and hone skills"

tation and consensus before trying things or testing theories. By that I mean a lot of checking in. As hard as this may be, I think it's necessary to develop methods to safeguard against, but also allow, for mistakes.

My ideal dynamic is a yay-team kind of feeling, which is a pretty likely development all things considered, living in each other's pockets and whatnot. I could say collective, but I think I'm positive, nerdy, and enthusiastic enough to say 'team.' One of the best roles I believe a captain can take is to facilitate discussion about strategies and choices of sail, hardware, and even watch schedules because then everyone feels part of the decision-making process and more involved in the day-to-day aspects of a trip. From what I have observed, another aspect that creates this sense of empowerment in all people onboard is the relationship that folks develop with the boat in port while preparing for a voyage and during workdays between legs. I find it helpful to keep an ongoing list with notes on what needs to be checked, altered, or repaired, and to regularly review it so that people can self-delegate depending not only on competency and enjoyment, but also on what they are looking to learn from each other and what they're willing to take on. In all cases this list is overseen by the captain because of the aforementioned reasons and because they are the person who has the most at stake. Not only does this get shit done without overburdening the boat-owner, it also helps people to get to know and feel invested in the bucket they're sailing on, more likely to confidently perform maneuvers, and to participate in problem solving. I also think it's pretty crucial that people aren't told that their help is not required when it is offered. The last thing crew needs is to feel unnecessary.

**Paul:** Lucky for you, I don't have much to say here! I own my boat and do all the work on it and so far I have only sailed with a rotating cast of friends who were on the boat for at most a couple months. This means maintenance, upkeep, repairs, and costs are all my responsibility. For some reason no one else wants to volunteer for these jobs... That said I try to make sure everyone on the boat has at least a basic idea of how to work all the bits, and I'm usually grateful for advice when there are problems.

In a general sense, I think specialization can be a blessing or a curse. A boat can move quickly and smoothly when a crew works together at familiar roles. Especially on long passages this can ease fatigue and make for happier, healthier sailing. It can also lead to rigidity, resentment, and, in the worst case, a situation where the whole boat becomes incapacitated if a single person is hurt. Luckily, rather than having one pro sailor and a bunch of landlubbers, most crews will have a spread of knowledge and experience. With communication and a degree of flexibility, especially in terms of recognizing how skills learned outside of sailing can be important on a boat, these strengths can work together such that the whole is stronger than the parts and the entire crew comes away learning new skills. An example: a member of the crew has never sailed before but is an experienced rock climber. This could be the person who is generally responsible for tying/checking critical knots (say rigging a rope harness to haul someone up the mast). This will make the boat safer, and it puts this person who might be feeling overshadowed by more experienced sailors in a position where their particular skills are put to use.

## Untitled by Saiya Miller saiyamiller@gmail.com

I started sailing when I was 21. That's almost three years ago now, and I can hardly believe how much has happened since, how big a part of my life it has become, and the huge network of sailors that has emerged out of the woodwork since then.

I learned to sail in the Bay Area. Several of my teachers would say, "If you can sail here, you can sail anywhere" and that motto has echoed in my head ever since. Though it has proved to be somewhat irrelevant in the technical sense, there are a few things I learned socially in the bay that have continued to affect my sailing life. Mostly, this: if you can stomach the good old boy, self satisfied bourgeois attitude of the yachting scene here, you can probably stomach it anywhere. I kept sailing despite this, and I am glad I did, because there is so much more to boats and sailing than a bunch of floating retirement plans.

The atmosphere of sailing school was funny. Everyone wore a wetsuit to insulate us from the cold bay waters. Wetsuits have an androgynous affect on everyone, they are full body binders, and I felt sort of like an action figure every time I put one on. This, combined with the vaguely formal structure of school, made a pretty fun and safe combination of wingnuts, Cal Berkeley students, and freaky punks learning to handle little Bahia dinghies together. I felt differently about some of the lessons I had on the bigger keel boats owned by older men of the Berkeley marina. I was disappointed when I realized, on one particular sail out to Angel Island, that I would not be shown how to tie a single knot or successfully complete a tack but instead would be either lectured at about the cost and speed of this boat or that boat, or hit on as if I had come out sailing on a date. I left the lesson wondering whether I should keep sailing at all, knowing I would never be taken seriously by these older sailing men. A sad truth that has come up time and again when I try to learn a real world skill; if you want to be talked to like a person who is worthy of a skill, you better tone down all things female.

### II.

*I do not have a sailor's body.*

*My skin is pale and the sun makes spots on my shoulders, like the circles of confusion in some photographs. Squinting into the sun my face crinkles up into the look I had as a child at the beach.*

*My hair is long.*

*On a boat it is annoying at best and dangerous at worst.*

*Teach me to fish, because it is no coincidence that I know how to use a sharp knife but not a fishing pole.*

*It is no coincidence that I'm not shocked by fish blood.*

*And I know just how to season it and what will be good on the side.*

### I.

*I sit at the helm and bite my nails. The seas becalmed and I've got a worried mind.*

*My boatmate tells me a Norwegian legend:*

*the sailors there say never throw your hair or nails overboard. there is a ship being built at the bottom of the ocean entirely out of hair and nails. when it is completed, it will set sail and bring about the end of the world.*

*I keep biting and later, I trim my bangs in the reflection on the winch.*

Luckily I found other sailors I admire and respect who have been great teachers to me when I have sailed with them. This keeps me going, keeps me wanting to be a sailor in the ugly world of cruisers. I want the skill and the quick reflex and the salty jargon and the power and responsibility, and I also want to lie naked on the bow, basking. I want to be the sailor and the mermaid and not have to choose.

Two years ago there was a summit of

these other sailors in Rio Dulce, Guatemala. Rio Dulce is a place where cruisers have flocked over the years, setting up an outpost of American influence in the heart of a small Guatemalan city. You can buy imported Boarshead deli meat and

III.

*on night shift we passed through the oil rigs  
at first i thought they were ships  
out in the gulf i was the only one awake  
the sails were full and we ran between them  
each one a little city, was anyone aboard? i  
cary lonely and lit up  
blasting the horn ten seconds apart  
they yell out in the early morning blue*

chili in plastic bowls. I started to notice that these women were around the bar quite often, not just working there but on the arms of older cruisers. I wondered what the arrangement was with a dubious feeling in my stomach. Most of them were younger than me. When we left Rio Dulce many of the boats sailed to the nearby island of Utila, one of the Bay Islands off the coast of Honduras. A couple of the cruisers were going the same route. Some of them had no crew, and instead simply brought along their Rio Dulce help. We watched one of the men motor out of the marina on the way down the river out to the ocean. As he turned the helm to leave the anchorage, a young Guatemalan women emerged from the cabin and handed him a cup of coffee.

The righteousness I felt in the US as a young white woman in a rich old white dudes world was thrown into a pale gray light of my new realization. I had to ask, what makes me or any of these punks different from the other Americans plopping themselves down in this town? I wanted to examine the ways that we are different from them, but also acknowledge what makes us similar. What makes us radical in our approach to the lifestyle of sailing when we leave our boundaries and go to other countries?

It is harder to draw a line through the water than through the dirt. You can't see the difference between one country and another offshore. You still cross borders on the ocean, everything has been boxed off by borders. You only notice different lines, depth changes the color of the water, seaweed gathers in a line and stretches toward the horizon. We like the water because it feels more fluid and more free and we can forget about the rules. But we are not the first people to feel free enough on water that we can hop off on any land and expect to be welcomed. In fact, this has been a long and troublesome trend. This doesn't mean stop sailing, quite the opposite. If anything it offers a key to the open ocean, a subversion of traffic, an old mode of wind and water and space away and apart. We can share that and use it wisely, use it to challenge those borders and boundaries, instead of following the arbitrary lines.

IV.

*tuna haikus*

*we caught something big  
we fought it and it gave up  
and we reeled it in  
just a tuna head,  
a shark had eaten the rest  
chomped it off the line*

*such an awful loss  
cursing we went back to bed  
our stomachs growling*

*we caught another  
only an hour later  
ate it four days straight.*

muenster cheese in the marina store, and the bar plays ESPN on the little television. Like many seaside towns in Central America and the Caribbean, the particular needs of the retired elite have been accommodated by the people who live there.

The cruisers of Rio Dulce had a chili cook off. A chili cook off with Texas style chili and cornbread. Cheddar cheese grated on the side. Young Guatemalan women were enlisted to help serve the

**Saiya:** It is difficult for me to think about specialization without also thinking about socialization. I think that in my experience, the tasks aboard a boat range from technical and mechanical to more amorphous and intuitive. Then there are the tasks involved in everyday life and upkeep of a boat, including cooking, cleaning, organizing, and caring for the boat. Since these tasks are often tied to ways we are socialized due to our gender, race, age, ability, etc, this often carries over to life on a boat. For example, I really love to cook and also get satisfaction from cleaning and organizing. Therefore I will often take on these tasks while aboard a boat. However, it frustrates me when after I show initiative to do those things, others relinquish the sharing of these tasks as well as whatever technical tasks they have taken on, and quickly fall into a pattern of assumptions about who will do which tasks while aboard a boat. I think one simple thing that a crew can do before sailing together is to sit down and talk about expectations, needs and hopes for what they want to be doing and learning while sailing. This way, everyone is able to put their needs and desires out on the table. Then this set of expectations can be referred back to during the sail itself.

**Emory:** My criticism of specialization is not of how or why knowledge is acquired but how knowledge is used. Knowledge can be a grand tool when utilized. If it is used solely for personal gain, this can be harmful to others' experiences. I view my privileged life as a chance to realize the direct correlation between my ability to share skills and the support I can offer safely. I want a chance to provide what others have allowed on their own vessels: a safe place for queers, people of color and women to diversify a sailing community patrolled by white men. I am excited to sail with most folks but find myself attracted to the former. I attempt to include a diversity of people, for the experience becomes more gainful with varying perspectives. I want to see more people like myself on the water, comfortable and ready for the inevitable mutual learning process.

**Jen:** I have crewed on boats ranging from 22-51 feet and typically on extended trips, so in some ways these simplistic dichotomies tend to fall away. Most of the captains who I've traveled with are generalist jack-of-all-trades types, with at least a rudimentary understanding of their boats' systems, maintenance, and repairs. Basically, they have to be not only sailors but also plumbers, electricians, machinists, mechanics, seamsters, possibly welders or fibreglassers, as well as general fix-it MacGyver types just like many of my young, less moneyed boat-owner friends. In this sense, I would also say that when shit breaks everyone on board has to put their heads together and haul out the manuals and the old Nigel Calder to find whatever might possibly shed light on the issue at hand. This has happened on almost every boat I have crewed on. It is typically the captain who has the majority of knowledge of his systems because he has come to know them well...though when your alternator is not charging your battery in the middle of the Bering Sea, which means that you won't even have running lights and there are lots of fishing vessels around, and its getting dark, and someone comes up with a solution, no one seems to care whose idea it was. Sometimes it is the least experienced crew who comes up with the answer because, as we all know, boats are about so much more than simply sailing. That said, the worst dynamics I've witnessed have come about because of some twisted human need to assign blame and I think that it is most crucial to create an open atmosphere while still finding ways to elicit consul-

when you're not sure what to do. In this moment of crisis we were all waiting for instruction, wasting time in inaction and hoping someone else would know what to do/take charge. Everyone was eager to help but not sure how. Having one person calling directions worked ok for us but we might have reacted faster if we had talked about this kind of situation beforehand.

I wish that we had talked the incident through as a crew afterwards, which we didn't really do. Still, I think that we all felt pretty good about the way things had gone. We worked smoothly as a crew and no one panicked. I do wonder how things would have gone if two of us had been convinced that we needed to do two different things. In the moment we only had seconds to act and there would have been no time for more than the briefest discussion. We were lucky that as a crew we sort of fell into a rhythm without conflict but I think that if I sail in a situation like that in the future I will want to discuss a clear emergency decision-making process long before one occurs. On my boat this is less of an issue. I am the sole owner and for my crews that has meant that in a crisis I have to be the one who makes the decision, even if I don't want to be! Luckily, we haven't yet run into anything so serious as a reef.

Ok, one last thing! Harnesses and safety gear. I've been putting in some offshore miles in thorny weather lately, and it has got me thinking about how to make decisions around safety gear. Personally, I don't much like wearing a harness. I feel pretty comfortable running around a boat at sea and I've rigged my boat with extra-high double lifelines to be sure. However, it makes me really nervous when others on the boat go on deck without them. I am confident in my own skills, but not quite willing to trust others, which is clearly unfair and probably foolhardy. On this trip I think that my personal disregard for safety gear led to a general laxity on the boat. This got to the point where we all noticed it. We talked about it in passing and everyone started to be a bit safer, wearing harnesses more often, reminding each other to wear them, and making an effort to keep them around the cockpit. It was a moment I felt pretty proud of because we were able to solve this problem not by making a rule but by taking personal initiative and reminding each other without getting resentful.

We are used to taking risks with the justification that it is a decision affecting us alone and therefore wholly ours. On a boat, as with all things, it gets more complicated. If someone falls from the mast their injury becomes everyone's burden, if they fall overboard in rough weather there is the fear everyone else experiences and also the risk that in trying to save them another crewmember will be hurt or an accidental jibe will put the boat at risk. Then, of course, there is the way that our personal decisions can create a culture either of safety or of danger aboard the boat. Lately, I'm trying to err more on the side of caution out of respect for the crew as a whole, even if it means sacrificing a bit of personal autonomy.

- **Many of us come from an anti-hierarchical perspective that's also critical of specialization. Sailing historically is very rooted in hierarchical principles and specialized roles which can lead to tensions such as crew/captain, worker/owner, inexperienced help/technician, to name a few. How does this play out for you and the people on your boat? What are ideal dynamics around maintaining a sailboat for you, and what efforts have you put towards realizing them?**

---

## A Discussion on Crew Dynamics

*Taking a boat out to sea isn't a radical move in itself, the potential lies in what you do when you're out there and how you do it. For some of us the opportunity for creating alternative spaces that could make sailing and life more fulfilling is rooted in how we relate to and treat each other. Having multiple persons aboard these small floating homes is at times the most difficult part of a voyage to navigate. We sent out a few questions to friends of ours about how these dynamics have worked out, and have not worked out, for them.*

- **Briefly describe your background in sailing and boats.**

**Saiya:** I went sailing a few times as a kid with a friend of the family who had a boat on the Hudson River. These were chaotic and adventurous outings, involving skinny dipping, evading storms, swimming against a current in a life preserver, and other delightfully, seemingly dangerous challenges. Then I returned to sailing in 2011, at Cal Berkeley sailing school in Berkeley, CA. I took lessons there for three months, then travelled to La Paz Mexico and helped work on a boat with the Ketch *Karaka* folks. When I returned to the Bay Area I took and passed a sort of boot-camp style sailing test for "Junior Skipper" status, a title I take smirking pride in to this day. I attended the DIY sailors meet-up in Rio Dulce, Guatemala, and crewed on the *S/V Dorothy Ann* from Guatemala back to Florida. I only sailed a few times between that voyage and the next time I set out on a longer trip. In May 2013 I crewed on the *S/V Black Pig* with Paul Calder and friends from New Orleans LA to Marathon Key, FL. My most recent project is fixing up a Mirror Class sailing dinghy and using it to wheedle around Lake Pontchartrain and maybe give some sailing lessons to friends. That's my boat experience summarized!

**Emory:** After a brief introductory adventure aboard *Pleiades* in 2012, I have been living and working along the eastern seaboard. I gained my most recent understanding, skill, and sailing vernacular this fall when a close friend asked me to sail her boat while she left to take care of other business. For seven months I formed a symbiotic relationship to *Noah's Ark*, her thirty-one foot seafarer, sailing to the Florida Keys, the Caribbean and beyond! Along the way I honed navigational skills, made terrible mistakes, and experienced an exponential growth of awareness and the self. The ability and necessity to approach decisive action has led me to refine my idea of seamanship, to see it in a different light. Seamanship: the ability to navigate and work out a puzzling situation in any condition with innovative ideas and safety considered.

**Jen:** I first learned to sail on a Laser II 14' dinghy with encouragement and guidance from a good friend. A few years later I was picking up books on sailing instruction, knot manuals, and reading solo circumnavigation tales; dreaming big nautical dreams but unsure of how to proceed with no budget and no background. Fortunately I met someone who explained that a person could basically show up at local yacht clubs and volunteer crew on amateur race day, something that I tried and did successfully in every major city I spent any amount of time in from then on. This helped me to develop a fair bit of know-how and the assurance that I don't get seasick. I started finding trips with friends of friends, talking to everyone I encountered about the desire to sail, and posting on message boards. The trips started to get longer and bigger and I hit a point where I actually announced that

sailing was my primary partner, that I would go anywhere that it asked and let most other things fall away. I often joke that Jimmy Cornell, author of “World Cruising Routes,” ruined my life because hours of study and transcription made clear to me that I could pretty much continue to sail around the world for the rest of my life and still not see and do all that I wanted to. This has only been my life for the past handful of years but at this point I have over 12,000 sea miles and have crewed on a range of sailboats from a 29’ staysail cutter with no head and no electronic navigation equipment to a South Pacific crossing on a 36’ Louisiana catamaran with a salon, trampoline, and my own cabin and head. The last boat I was on not only had autopilot, but also a fridge and even a washing machine (only with shore power, rest assured). That said, we still had lengthy discussions about how many elastic bands and which size wrench to hang off the jury-rigged solenoid switch string delay, so I guess a sailboat is a sailboat after all, at least until I start crewing on luxury yachts—and to hell with that. Most of the boats I’ve been on have been pretty DIY, even the one owned by the dentist, and this is likely in part because I’m trying to sail with folks I feel some sort of commonality with and also because I want to gain experience dealing with quirky systems because when I do own a boat it’s going to be even quirrier. I think a lot has been said against the boogie retired sailing couple and there is a stereotype for a reason, but I’ve mostly sailed with people who were misfits in their own ways, who had maybe found a way to make some money and most likely lived aboard and were in it for the long haul. They were in need of crew because they wanted to make epic passages and they found it crucial, helpful, and less lonely to take someone on.

**Paul:** I grew up sailing, for better or worse. I lost interest for many years, jumping back in just a few years ago when I bought a wreck of a fiberglass boat. My family owned a succession of 35-45’ fiberglass sloops and from my screaming/crying/kicking years to mid-middle-school we spent most winters living on it in the Caribbean. Escaping that, I occupied myself with anything but sailing for a decade or so before getting excited about it again, eventually buying a boat to fix up in New Orleans. That was a 2.5 year project which took me deep into the ins-and-outs of old rotten fiberglass, electrical systems, plumbing, engines, and desperate Craigslist scouring. Recently I’ve actually sailed the thing, putting in my first 2000 miles as ‘captain’ on a trip from NOLA to Maine.

**Morgan:** When I was much younger, my grandfather would take me out on his old cat boat. I was a little kid, so I didn’t get much “sail theory” out of it, but I think the early experience did plant something of a seed in my little brain. For the most part, however, my sailing experience is a bizarre spin-off punk rock. Many years ago, K from *Pestilence* wound up on the couch at my old place in Brooklyn, telling tales of her winter spent fixing a shitty old boat and sailing it in the Caribbean. At the time, I was far too deeply enmeshed in the punk rock aesthetic of squalor to really hear that you could DIY your way to a semi-tropical land of sunshine and beaches and whatnot. Even while talking, in person, to someone in my community, sharing vaguely similar values and background and perspectives on society who had just done this on the cheap, I still thought of sailing as... well... yachting. Dudes in immaculate white upholding some Yankee maritime tradition, battling for yacht club honor; as, perhaps, the ultimate expression of bourgeois affluence and leisure. Baggage from sailing in New England with my grandfather, I guess, who’s dumpy little 20’ trailered catboat was called *dreadnaught* and had a complete set of

that everyone is comfortable with taking advantage of the wind to press on for another day. Then we go into a planning discussion where those with more experience discuss stuff like which sails to fly, how to time our passage so as to arrive in daylight and with a fair tide, etc, etc. Anyone is encouraged to speak at any time but as the planning gets more detailed those with less experience tend to listen while the more skilled do the speaking. We can learn a great deal from listening in on discussions between folks with more experience, but we have to be able to understand what the hell is being said! With this in mind even if only half of the crew is doing the detail planning we try to be sure that everyone is present and understands what decisions are being made, and why.

There is a darker side to this, though. On my last trip from New Orleans to Maine this style of decision-making made for less exhausting and safer passages but it became so standard that I think it kept some of my crew from learning as much as they would have liked. Myself and one or two other crewmembers tended to take charge while others were less involved. At the time I thought this was because they just weren’t as interested in the running of the boat but thinking about it now I realize it might have just been that I never really asked them to do much, or actively consulted their opinions. I expected they would speak up more if they wanted to be involved but of course it’s difficult to speak up when conversation is dominated by those with more experience!

This question brings up two other thoughts that seem worth exploring. The first has to do with emergencies. In an emergency on a boat inaction is often far worse than even misguided action and yet it’s likely to be unclear what the best course of action is. As a crew, how do you decide what to do in a crises, and how do you put this decision to action?

An example: Over Christmas I was sailing in the Bahamas with three friends on a boat that belonged to someone who wasn’t there. We were all pretty inexperienced. I had the most time at sea, and maybe the most broad experience, while another friend was more familiar with the boat and had done more sailing recently. At one point there was a series of errors and, underpowered, we were sucked through a reef. Up to that point most decision-making on the boat had been a slow, collective process. We hadn’t laid out any particular rules for it, we simply discussed things as a group with each offering their experience and opinion until we decided what to do.

When coming up on this reef it was clear that we needed to act very quickly but no one really knew what to do. There was a moment of confusion and slow panic followed by inaction. All in the dark about how to react I think everyone was waiting for someone else to take charge, or at least make a suggestion. I was at the helm and felt like I had to do something. In the absence of other ideas I started calling out what were, essentially, orders, the first time this had happened on the boat. They were confused and chaotic and probably not the best course of action but people followed them smoothly and we got lucky. We hit the reef right at its tip and bounced over more-or-less unscathed. And we been twenty feet to the left we may well have lost the boat.

What I took away from this is that in an emergency quick action is essential, even

unsafe, like sailing into an unfamiliar harbor after sundown or heading into a narrow passage with no knowledge of which way that strong current is flowing. Ideally this will not cause the captain to feel that their authority is being undermined or other crewmates feel invalidated and, while we're talking about ideals, it would be great if this kind of consideration didn't come up very often. There is too much happening in terms of risk assessment to have to be concerned about ego bruising.

**Paul:** In a world circumscribed with borders, laws, and police forces many of us make a conscious effort to reject a social order which tells us that decisions should be made by learned specialists and followed by the rest. On the sea we do this every day: when we sail in motoring-only canals, when we anchor in mooring fields and reject outrageous fees to use what is the property of every person who goes to sea, or tie our dinghies to trees and abandoned bridges instead of paying extortionate 'landing fees.' Even when we simply drop anchor among other boats, breaking no law but the unspoken one, dictated by fear, which says that only maniacs come into harbor under sail. This spirit of rebellion is a beautiful thing, but I also worry that it might keep us from listening to lessons about procedure which are passed on by generations of seafarers.

The greatest of pirates operated in autonomous rebel societies where decisions were made by consensus and crews were a mix of genders and races. There is a reason radical sailors obsess over their history! Still, in the heat of battle an (elected) pirate captain was truly in charge, and at this time their word was law. Even the rigid authority of the merchant service had a similar clause. On a ship at sea the owner would be treated as a king but in event of a storm or battle his hired captain had the legal right to contravene direct orders as he saw fit for the safety of the vessel.

Many of these people believed that at times a form of hierarchy can be an important tool to protect our safety, and I am inclined to agree. I don't mean to say that there need be a captain, or any particular form of organized hierarchy. A prescription of this sort would be the worst possible thing, a retreat to the authoritarian traditions of seafaring that we are actively rejecting. But I do think that when a crew is deciding how they will make decisions it is worth considering that an imbalance of power/experience can also be an asset.

Growing up sailing, seeing how quickly and terribly things can go wrong, has coloured a lot of my feelings on crew dynamics. This is also true of the type of sailing I have been doing. My feelings about crew dynamics are focused on crews on passage in open waters where there is a lot that can go wrong, and the stakes can be high. I think that in this kind of sailing if one or more people are clearly more skilled and experienced it is often easier on crew and boat if opinions of the more experienced are given more weight, particularly when there are concerns about safety.

My experience is that for crews that get along well this happens quite organically. On my boat, for example, general decisions are made as a crew but in these discussions the opinions of those with greater experience tend to carry more weight, and are usually used to decide the specifics of the situation. Coming up the coast on an offshore passage with a stiffening breeze we might decide first as a crew

signaling flags and shit. Years later, M, also from *Pestilence*, lived at another house in Pittsburgh with me, but again, I didn't really make the connection. It wasn't until I was moving out of Pittsburgh and trying to figure out what to do with myself that I again stumbled into the world of punks on boats.

The 2012 meet-up was, for me, well timed and inspiring. Meeting dozens of "my people," punks and anarchists and queers and wingnuts, who had made it to Guatemala and had organized workshops and social space, had fixed up old boats and sailed them hundreds or thousands of miles, finally made the connection. Sailing fits right in there, into whatever the fuck it is that we're doing, in both the good ways and the bad. It's a democratic technology, a set of skills that you can learn through practice without needing formal schooling or licensing, a relatively simple machine that you can maintain and fix yourself that provides access to a wide world in which you can make your own adventures. It also exposes some privileges, like how easy it is for some of us to drop out, to be escapist and ignore the brutality of capitalism, or how easy it is to cross borders when you're born in the global north and have the right kind of passport. After the meet-up, I sailed on *Dorothy Ann*, back from Guatemala to the US via a couple other stops, buddy-boating with two other ~30 foot, ~30 year old plastic sloops, also packed full of punks. Last year, I bought a 28' cutter and sailed between the Bahamas and Florida all winter, exploring every abandoned hotel, former drug transshipment point, and deserted research center along the way. I sold that boat, and am now on the west coast, putzing around the SF Bay on friend's sloops or playing on sailing dinghies.

- **Many times there's an imbalance of power and experience aboard. People often times sail on boats looking to learn and hone skills. How is this facilitated on your boat or the boats you've been on? How does this imbalance manifest in positive and negative ways?**

**Saiya:** I think that it is positive to have a variety of experience levels aboard a boat as long as knowledge is being shared in a way that feels mutually invited. I think that it is easy for knowledge to be shared in a way that feels condescending to the person absorbing the knowledge, therefore getting in the way of their learning process. I think the intentions of everyone aboard should be stated clearly in the beginning of a voyage and that people should try to treat each other with respect and care on any sailing expedition. One positive side to knowledge imbalance is the ability to observe someone who really knows their stuff operating their boat and being able to ask questions or ask for something to be explained as it is happening. For me, this is a good way to learn because I often need to see something done or do it myself in order to be able to remember it. Another one of the most positive possible outcomes of a knowledge imbalance on boats I have been on is the ability to share the role of "teacher." I think that it is often very stressful to have one person with a lot of knowledge and all the other crew with minimal knowledge. Rather, if several people aboard know at least the basics of sailing, and maybe there are one or two people with minimal experience, those aboard with knowledge get to share the task of teaching certain skills. This makes for a more relaxing and spontaneous teaching environment on a boat where anyone can step into the role of teaching and being taught.

**Emory:** I have had the pleasure sailing with friends familiar with the style of com-

munication that aligns itself with our shared values. Navigating personal qualms, finding comfort living in cramped spaces with an opportunity to ask questions and receive an honest realistic answer is intrinsic to even begin discussing the imbalances and how as a crew we perceive work together. The one time I crewed for a stranger I was shocked at how our communication tactics differed. He was conveniently going to the exact place we wanted to go, so my friend and I jumped at the chance to crew for him. We rashly approached the situation with the excitement of children, unaware that even though one may be getting what one wants out of a situation, there are consequences to everything. This hit us like a rogue wave while crossing the gulf stream.

Our captain of the sturdy *Curlew* had worked as an engineer. His mind produced similar ends through different means. And yet the path of least resistance evaded him. He was stubborn and uncompromising to the point where my friend and I had to suffer through poor navigational triangulations and pretend our previously offered plan was suddenly his smart idea. Even though we are amateur sailors we had navigated the gulf stream to Cuba only two weeks before. Maybe if he had dropped his defensive attitude and listened we could have prevented the 8 extra hours tacking towards Marina Hemingway. A little too late, the thick of the passage was an inappropriate time to discuss boundaries. I learned when I need to speak up to be able to feel confident and safe.

**Jen:** I crew on other peoples' boats for several reasons: I am interested in informal mentorships; I like to travel by sea; I like to travel by land with little thought of why or where or when; and I cannot currently afford either a boat or the expense of the world-travel type of ambitious sailing I am interested in doing (this is likely in part because I keep running away to hitch boats which is hardly lucrative, but that is another topic). The price I pay for not being my own captain is a lack of autonomy--I won't go so far as to say authority--and this manifests in overt and subtle ways. Sometimes this means what music we listen to on board, or how long we stay anchored in a place, or even which country we end up in if conditions or proclivities change. It can also mean feeling my lifestyle cramped and identity compromised, which is not worth detailing but worth mentioning, as we are talking about power and therefore dominance and it is near impossible to keep the personal out of daily boat duties. The greatest benefit I can see is that I have a range of experiences on a variety of vessels with a diverse set of teachers as well as skill sets I cultivated prior to sailing. I naturally prefer the kinder captains but I could make the claim that I've learned just as much from the jerks as I have from the shining sailors who took it upon themselves to teach me all that they could—that is, I've observed how I'd like to be and pitfalls I ought to try to avoid. These observations range from when and how to reef to developing nonviolent communication. That said, I've tried to simply avoid captains who set off warning bells even if they're going to exactly where I'm looking to get to and have a beautiful boat; in the end it usually isn't worth it.

I've also learned that everyone has something to teach, regardless of whether they are good teachers, and that a lot of learning comes from crew observation and initiative. Earlier in my 'career' I had one trip in particular that taught me more than any other—the captain encouraged me to make and continue to develop a list of skills required to become what I saw to be a proficient sailor, and daily checked

influenced by the aforementioned variables. To idealize is to limit expansion of concepts and shun the idea of endless outcomes and possibilities. I long for strong, decisive action that is not made at the expense of another person's autonomy. This is hardly realistic, an occurrence that may either validate or betray the fact that someone is not speaking up to preserve the group. The desires/needs of an individual affect the whole. Unspoken, non-consensual action ultimately deteriorates the strength of the whole crew, which can lend itself to disaster. My kind of captain would be wise in the decision making process and aware of when compromise is appropriate. A well-intentioned crew would express when one's own needs or desires remain unfulfilled as to facilitate and strengthen connection. I work on making it happen but we all come from environments convoluted with past crises and difficulties, and every sail is different. To sail in many different realms of varying crew requires willingness to unlearn and eventually a deftness in tact, awareness, and communication.

**Jen:** I have always sailed as crew, though the dynamics have varied somewhat depending on whether I have been sailing with friends or other people. Decision-making has looked different from boat to boat depending very much upon the disposition of the captain, the purpose of the trip, and the dynamic and experience level of the crew. I have traveled with boat owners who proved to be fairly reckless and arrogant but, thankfully, I have more often sailed with captains who ask me what I think, delegate large responsibilities to crew, and who are willing to at least hear suggestions; this has helped me immensely. I have been in situations where so long as people aren't endangering the boat or my life I simply put up with negative or problematic approaches to their 'authority' because I'd rather not take on processing in addition to sailing with someone I likely won't see again. Perhaps this sounds a little weak. Trust, I speak my mind, but I also find that sometimes it is better to draw boundaries and offer to discuss certain topics only when in port. There has and continues to be a learning curve for me with working with folks who have possibly never been part of a communal living situation, collective, or even thought to discuss a concept like 'power dynamics,' gender, or hegemony. Also I typically sail with one or two other people, and for longer or multiple passages. This means that in a short amount of time I must be able to do most things solo. This requires a lot of consultation and explanation as well as accountability. I have, in the past, caught myself deferring to the owner of a boat not just because they know their ship best, but also because if something breaks I would rather it be them who made the decision and therefore carry the responsibility; and also because it is easier. I am willing to admit that, though I'm not proud of it, but I don't think I'm alone. It's apparent that being a Captain can be just as much a burden as it is freeing. It's stressful to be in command, to be looked to for answers and to take responsibility for the crew's safety, all of this from the person who is likely getting the least sleep. I think it's very helpful for less experienced crew to speculate on possible situations they may encounter during their watch and ask questions or generate conversation so that they are aware of reasonable courses of action and don't feel that they need to wake the captain up. Something along the lines of, ok, so if the wind continues to shift and I have to alter course accordingly to the west, at what point do you think it would be appropriate to tack? That said, those people less familiar with the boat benefit from feeling safe to wake up their crewmates to ask for help or advice if they are uncertain. I also think it's important that crew let it be known when they feel that a course of action may be unwise or

In my experience the safety, efficacy, and enjoyment of any crew hinges more on their ability to live and work together than on anything else, including imbalances of experience and decision-making power. It is often the way in which these small moments of dissonance are negotiated which determines this dynamic. But there are also times when the boat is in no danger, short or long-term, and I need to stop obsessing and just chill the fuck out. I'm getting there.

If this sounds a bit rigid, I ought to point out that on most boats the roles of teacher/learner will be fluid, taken by each of the crew according to their desires and abilities at a particular moment. Hopefully they will be active roles on both sides. When you are doing the work of teaching it is made much easier when others are eager to learn, and vocal about what their learning style is. Above all, I think it is important to avoid moralizing about or becoming stuck in particular ways of learning and teaching. This means good communication about how different approaches work for each person and the boat. Ideally, all parties should be ready to accept that their preferred style of teaching or learning may not work for someone else, or may not be acceptable because of risks to the vessel. This kind of communication might just defuse some all-too-common situations where a person feels stifled and frustrated by too much instruction, or where someone becomes resentful and stressed out because they think things should be done in what they see as a better and/or safer way. For me the goal is to be conscious of our imbalances of power and experience and find ways to use them so that they help the crew to learn and develop together rather than driving us apart.

- **What are the typical dynamics of being on a boat for you (captain/co-captain/crew/collective/etc)? What does decision making typically look like aboard? What are your ideals of the dynamics on a boat and how does the reality contrast/reflect them?**

**Saiya:** Boat decisions have looked like a consensus model in which there are usually only 3 or 4 people involved in any given decision, and where the decisions made should optimally make sense for the safety and happiness of the crew and the boat. This can get tricky while sailing because although each person's opinion should be taken into account, sometimes decisions need to be made immediately, without hesitation. I think that the person who is most responsible for the boat should sensibly fill this role. If someone notices a problem and needs to act accordingly, they should be able to call upon the rest of the crew to help them address that problem. In my experience, there has been one "captain," however, the whole crew makes decisions that suit the group's needs.

**Emory:** My best experiences have varied greatly; each new vessel provides a glance to innumerable styles of how a boat could be run. Crews, groups of people, act differently when introduced to each other and put through challenging circumstances. In any given situation experience level is inevitably a variable. Three months of travel becomes incomparable to three days and two nights spent on the water with intermittent time on land. As with many facets of my life I have come to rely on the one constant: anything can happen even in seemingly controlled environments. I choose to be ready to roll with the punches and the fluidity, the possibilities of the moment. I mean to say that the decision making process is heavily

in with me to see how things were coming along and which maneuvers or discussions were required to fulfill them. Anything from changing the engine oil to being on foredeck for dousing the whisker pole, or getting crash-coursed in celestial navigation. As time has gone by, I've realized it's pretty rare to sail with someone who took such an interest in my progress. He taught me some fundamental skills and great habits, now it has been left to me to continue to add to and cross items off of this list, to ask many questions and to encourage this approach to learning with my crewmates and captains. Some boat owners I've encountered have been new to having crew come aboard and that has its own challenges and responsibilities as well; I think it is always a negotiation and a dynamic that requires a great deal of communication. Depending on the trip, giving demonstrations can seem extraneous and yet much of what needs to be transmitted is crucial to the wellbeing of the vessel and everyone on board. Most boats I've sailed on have decent libraries and I try to bring along books that will contribute to that resource for the duration of the trip. I also think it's important for a captain to designate tasks and enlist helpers even in jobs that can be done single-handedly so that crew can have opportunities to learn and also relieve one person from taking on too much. While I recognize that handing over the reigns can be stressful, I reckon it's significantly less so if you have personally instructed crew in how to best do a task on your boat and watched them complete it independent of you. In addition, it's also helpful if everyone on board can work at being receptive to suggestions and the many variations that exist for all jobs. If people seriously cannot agree on how to do things then I think it reasonable to rotate methods so that everyone gets a chance to try different practices so long as they don't endanger anything or one. I also believe that it's super beneficial for individuals to keep log books so that they are each attentive to things like sail configuration, changing conditions, sea state, weather patterns, and engine hours; not that I think it should be an enforced rule, just a suggestion.

I think it best to recognize that some folks do well with learning through observation and others with verbal instruction, I say we do it all ways, ask each other what works best for them and then everyone wins. Everything on a sailboat eventually has to be hands on. I had a very green crewmate who was really into 'figuring it out himself' which literally meant that he wanted to have no one observing or commenting...I didn't much appreciate this as I think that kind of shit breaks boats. I believe this stemmed from insecurity and I know we aren't children, but I actually think that less experienced sailors benefit from being congratulated. Wait, I'll revise that, let's all congratulate each other regardless of levels of experience. I've often thought that sailing is the most humbling thing, or rather set of ten simultaneous things, I've ever done, but who doesn't like a little encouragement?

**Paul:** The world of sailing is small to begin with, and our gathering force of radical sailors in particular is in its infancy. We have so much to learn, and to teach, both within our communities and with the help of others who are sympathetic to this rising tide. Yet really we're all beginners, nearly all of us at any rate, trying to teach these skills as we are learning them, often on boats which lack some of the most basic devices which might make this easier.

How do you teach someone to read the wind and trim sails when the only sails you've got are blown out and lack telltales? How to explain sailing, in these condi-

tions, when what little I understand myself is carried more by intuition than technique? And how does the boat come in? The health of the boat must be considered during all this, hell it should often be considered above all else. Many people in this community have tired of authoritarian teachers and a hierarchy of knowledge, choosing instead to learn from the ecstatic chaos of taking risks and making mistakes. But how to we reconcile this style of learning with a floating home which is so fragile, so easily lost? Should we deny this spirit and if we do does that make us any better than a long line of failed teachers? These are the questions which I struggle with, when trying to help others discover a love sailing. The answers, when there are any, are ethereal, constantly shifting, taking on new forms, losing and gaining relevancy.

As a tool for discussion, I think that we can break down the ways we learn to sail into two broad categories. The first is experiential learning, and in particular learning by mistake. This happens when we just get out and sail, worrying little about what we may or may not know, fucking up as we go and then guessing at what to do next. It is a clumsy way to learn, and often slow, but it is exhilarating and inspiring. There is no better way to build confidence than to put yourself in a tight situation and then get yourself out again, unaided. When we go out with room to experiment, to play, and to fuck up, we discover the joys and challenges of sailing.

Growing up, I got to go to a sailing camp for a couple weeks every summer. It wasn't some well-heeled Martha's Vineyard bullshit meant to train kids on yachting etiquette but a real Maine sailing camp. It was cheap and chaotic and the goal was to get us to love sailing and, if possible, keep us from killing ourselves. Picture little kids in surprisingly large boats, tearing around a crowded harbor, crashing into each other and the docks, capsizing left and right: we fucking loved it. This, I think, is the way to attract people to sailing; how we show our family, friends, and lovers the terrific joy of the thing.

Then there is learning by instruction, the more traditional way. This is learning from books or lectures, but also from a teacher or mentor. It is often also learning by experience, but with a bit more guidance. Taking the helm, say, but with someone nearby to warn you when you are about to run up on a sandbar, or to instruct you on how best to trim the sheets. Where learning by mistake builds confidence more rapidly than skill, learning by instruction is a great way to learn finesse and more complex techniques. Stuff like navigation, judging wind and tide in tricky channels, learning to read the wind and to set a comfortable amount of sail. When we learn by instruction we draw on traditions of knowledge which go back centuries, once learned the hard way and now passed on to us. This type of learning relies on imbalances of experience, but it can also be ruined by them.

Learning to sail together means accepting and forgiving failures, both our own and those of others, but this is often easier when we are coming from the same knowledge base (or lack thereof). As differences in experience grow and we begin to teach and learn more by instruction differences in power, authority, and styles of learning complicate things. Many people are partial to one style of learning or another and may tune out or become frustrated if they feel forced to learn in a way that doesn't work for them. The same applies to sharing knowledge. Teaching can be phenomenally difficult and in teaching roles we often make mistakes and are

sometimes simply unable or unwilling to give people the type of instruction they prefer.

As always, communication is key. I am increasingly finding that an ease of teaching and learning together comes from an ability to communicate the ways in which we, as individuals, best learn and share skills. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the way I learn best is the best way to learn. As a teacher I have made this mistake and at times been ineffectual despite good intentions. When learning I have made the opposite mistake, that of becoming frustrated by or disdainful of someone from whom I could have learned a lot, and sacrificing that knowledge to my pride.

Then there is the boat itself. Generally, I think it helps to consider the boat a member of the crew, with its own wants and needs. There are no hard lines on a boat, no one right or wrong way and yet every action, and inaction, is a form of risk; so many decisions become clearly right, or clearly wrong, when we feel their effects. The more we learn, the more able we are to project a decision into the future, to predict its outcome in the incredibly complex interplay of wind, sea, and vessel. In order to safeguard our boats we need to be able to access risks. The goal does not need to be deciding the best possible action (this is important only in the latter, finer stages of learning) but only to avoid the worst. Even this is far more difficult than it seems but this is where an imbalance of experience and power can be most useful. My 'ideal' teacher is someone who can make these predictions and use this risk assessment to allow those who are learning leeway to make their own mistakes, while keeping ready to give direction and even take command when the stakes are too high. Of course this is just my ideal; determining where to draw these lines is a fluid process, one which should be discussed and decided on by all parties whenever possible.

As a boat owner and de-facto captain, when I am in a teaching role I struggle with the often dichotomous pull between giving others the freedom to learn by experience while doing what is best for the short and long-term care of my boat. In the general sense I do not consider my boat a place for learning by mistakes. I have invested too much of myself in it and I sail it with a fair degree of caution. When I am the most experienced aboard, which so far has mostly been the case, I typically take charge when I am concerned for the boat. With big risks this is usually easy to negotiate – nobody minds when I ask to take the helm as we're coming through a tricky entrance or about to broach in a squall. The devil is in the details. Sometimes we're close-hauled and, lying in my berth, I can hear the sails whipping. I can't sleep because I know that this sound means the life of my sails is being cut short, but I am reluctant to go on deck and trim them because this feels like taking autonomy from whoever is on watch. I could lie in bed and stew, or trim the sails without a word and go to sleep but either choice will probably lead to frustration and resentment: maybe I feel like this person just doesn't care about my boat, or they feel like I care more about getting somewhere quickly than respecting their autonomy. Or, I could trim the sails but explain that I'm doing this for the health of the boat, and take time to show the helmsperson exactly what I'm doing. As a more experienced crewmember I can choose to take the time to teach while the less experienced person can choose to give me the benefit of the doubt, accepting that I am doing this out of concern for the boat and not as an affront to their autonomy.