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Setting sail at the Community Boating Center

I arrived for my first lesson at the Community Boating Center, a non-profit, public-access program for beginners and enthusiasts alike, really only knowing two things about sailing: I was pretty sure it involved boats and wind. Beyond that, I assumed I would have to learn to tie some fancy knots (like the bowline, the clove hitch and the reverse cowgirl) and pick up a few basic sailing terms (like tacking, jibbing and skeeting) but for all intents and purposes, I was going into this knowing nothing.

My instructor was Will, an affable, seafaring type in his late 20s/early 30s, who seemed to think I would be able to get out on the water that day despite the fact that I was already two lessons behind the rest of the class. (I started in the second week of a three-week program.) He offered me the chance to either observe alongside him, or hop in with one of the two- and three-person teams prepping their little sunfish boats. "Community boating means we're all about the community approach," he explained. "People learning from each other." While I wasn't so sure I wanted to take the Montessori approach to learning how to sail, I let Will team me up with Bo,

a rather confident looking fellow who appeared to be in his late 40s, and Jill, a woman who claimed not to know much more than I did.

Before we hit the water, Will gave us a quick overview of what we would be working on that day, charting a course that would teach us how to jibe, or change course by turning the sail across a wind that's behind us, and diagramming some points of sail we would be employing in the process. Having missed the early

knot-tying and terminology-learning lessons, his pep talk would have made about as much sense to me if he had given it in Arabic. Sailing has an *extensive* glossary.

After a few minutes it was into the water. I focused on my first personal goal: getting into the boat without capsizing it right there at the



dock. Once that was accomplished, I focused on my next personal goal: staying out of the way and not capsizing the boat out on the bay. As we set sail, Bo acted as skipper and manned the mainsheet (the rope that controls the boom to which the sail is affixed), while Jill took control of the tiller (the handle that moves the rudder), and I practiced ducking (strategically lowering one's head so as not to be struck by the boom as it swings back and forth). Bo seemed

to have a pretty good command of not only the boat, but the terminology and the theory of sailing as well. He claimed it was simply the result of reading one book, but compared to Jill and I, he sounded like an admiral. Will would periodically buzz up alongside us in his little motorboat to dispense advice and compliments, like some sort of friendly, helpful Somali pirate.

After a few laps around the course, I was given control of the tiller. I steered us through several turns, feeling surprisingly capable as we made a pretty smooth lap. However, on the second lap, perhaps bolstered by overconfidence and Will telling me I was "a natural," I suddenly developed a knack for steering us directly into the wind, bringing the boat to a dead stop ("in irons" is the term for it). I gave up the tiller, and after a brief, awkward attempt to control the mainsheet, I chose to sit back and let Bo take over, as he ably guided us through another couple of laps around the course.

Finally, it was time to head back in, strip the boat of its sail and rudder, and haul her out of the water. As I was climbing back onto the dock, I unknowingly cut a small gash in my knee, which I didn't discover until several minutes later. "You're bleeding; are you okay?" one of my fellow sailors asked. "Yeah, I'm fine," I reassured her, adding with pride, "It's my first sailing injury." *Want to get on the water yourself? Check out the Community Boating Center at 109 India Street (next to India Point Park), call them 454-SAIL or visit them online at communityboating.com. - John Taraborelli*



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