

THE WINTER SAIL

by Timothy J. Muise

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People who know me would not be surprised to hear that I was deemed a "behavioral - problem" in high school. Due to this determination I was placed in an Outward Bound based course called Project Adventure. Project Adventure had two courses; one dealt with the environment and the other was a boat building course. When I first arrived at the school the only class that had a slot was the environment class and that is where they placed me. It was a wonderful experience as the class only had one other male in it and the rest were females. I was popular and never felt so alive as I did around all of this femininity. That first half year went by fast and I then entered the boat building course with instructor Jim Schoel. A finer human being you will not find.

We built 19' Cape Banks Dorries in this class. Dory fishing was a big deal in Gloucester and one of our biggest folk heros is Howard Blackburn who rowed from the Grand Banks to Nova Scotia after being left by his Schooner for dead. Jim wanted us to learn our history through hands on labor. We took these dories, we had a fleet of a half dozen or more at all times, on a three day, twenty one mile trip each year. The entire class lived on the islands off of Cape Ann for three days: it was truly awesome! Sleeping on Straitsmouth, Kettle, and Ram Islands was an adventure all in itself, but to row the miles in between with guys and gals in the boats taught us more about life than the tough living.

The efforts of this class got us noticed. People saw our red and green dories rowing all around the harbor and up the Annisquam River. Jim was great at public relations and landed us many monetary supporters. This enabled the class to climb mountains, rent and paddle canoes on the

Ipswich River, as well as restore an old house on Ram Island. One of the folks who noticed the class was Philip Weld who lived on Dolliver's Neck. Mr. Weld held the solo trans-Atlantic sailing record on more than one occasion and was a boat designer/builder himself. He had worked on designing a tri-maran (three hulled) sailboat, with two masts/sails, that could be easily sailed by one person. He called this boat the SIB which stood for "Simple Is Beautiful". After sailing the SIB for quite sometime, and applying its successful aspects to other boat designs, Mr. Weld donated the boat to our school! It was unbelievable and we were so excited.

The SIB was about 30' long and had beautiful mesh nets between the central main hull and the right and left outrigger hulls. Jim would take the whole class out to teach us to sail and everyone would lounge in the tightly strung nets. Young girls in bikinis sprayed by the flying ocean water made these trips an adolescent boys delight. We sailed from the Dog Bar Breakwater to Rockport's Lands End. From Lands End to the granite pile at Halibut Point. He tacked in the wind and sailed fast with the prevailing breeze. The class loved the SIB and these kids, many from abusive homes and low income situations, got to enjoy the pleasures of a privileged life. Jim loved this teaching "vehicle" and took us out whenever he could and even brought his young son Luke along. I made some weekend sails with Jim and we went a bit further off shore as he knew that I was from a "boat" family. I had been lobstering with my older brother Bobby since I was a young boy.

We moored the SIB at the mouth of Smith Cove, off of Pirate's Lane

in East Gloucester. A family who lived on the Lane, the afKlinterbergs/Marstons, let us keep our equipment in their cellar. We had dory oars, water jugs, and old Coast Guard "bubble" life vests. The most important item was the old 4 horsepower Evinrude outboard we used to power the SIB out of the the inner harbor. We would use this little kicker as sparingly as possible but it was near impossible to sail in the confines of the south channel of the inner harbor. It was quite a scene to witness the parade of high school students heading out from the afKlinterberg/Marston property wearing bubble vests, lugging water jugs, and shouldering the blue/gray outboard motor. Jim always had a proud look on his face as we exhibited this team work as he knew we would have to work like a team when we all climbed Mt. Kearsarge that winter. We were preparing for bigger things.

Fall turned into winter and we had to get the SIB over to Herb Montgomery's Marina down the Annisquam River. The problem was that the Blynman drawbridge at the mouth of the river was under repair and the masts of the SIB certainly would not fit underneath. We would have to sail the SIB around Cape Ann and come in at the Ipswich Bay entrance to the river. Jim called my house and asked if I could go with him on Saturday to sail the SIB around. I told him I would not miss it for the world.

Jim picked me up at my house on Neptune Place Saturday morning. I noticed that the wind was blowing pretty good, at least 20 to 24 MPH. We took a ride around the back shore to check out the sea and I was no stranger to such rides as my brother and I had done this dozens of times before lobstering trips. Jim and I noticed there was a great chop off of Eastern Point, probably 3 to 4 foot seas, but it seemed to lessen as you

turned the corner at Lands End. Jim asked if I thought that we might want to wait for a better day but I told him that it did not look too bad and I felt that if we bundled up and sat low in the cockpit it should not be too big of a deal. We drove down to Pirate's Lane, got some life vests and the outboard, and then rowed the skiff out to the SIB. In no time the small Evinrude was pattering us out of the South Channel and into the outer harbor. We adorned sail just off Ten Pound Island and headed for the tip of the Dog Bar Breakwater. As we rounded the breakwater the extent of the chop revealed itself to us. It was damn rough and the SIB rode hard as we had to tack back and forth to make headway. Freezing cold spray soaked us a few times as we made our zig zags across an angry sea. The craft flew through the rough sea like three knife blades through butter, you could feel how well built she was, but it was still only a 30 feet boat which always seems to get smaller when the conditions get worse. In all actuality we probably should not have been out there, but I was a Gloucesterman afterall, from the City of Howard Blackburn, and a little winter chop cannot impede our voyage: not when your from this town.

We fought hard with the tack until we reached Land's End. The sea was not as angry there and we now had the wind with us. I took Jim's alcohol stove and begun the process of heating us up some Campbell's chicken noodle soup for lunch. Jim was looking at me with a strange gaze but I paid it no mind. I was hungry and wanted to eat. The soup heated up fast and I made a mug for Jim and I. It tasted like it was made at the Le Cordon' Bleau! We made great time from Land's End around to Halibut

Point. We had a pleasant route down past Folly Cove, by Lanesville, close to the Bay View shoreline, and then in between Lighthouse and Wingarsheek beaches to the mouth of the Annisquam. We brought the sails down and fired up the outboard and enjoyed the short cruise up the river to Montgomery's Boatyard.

It was not until long after the trip that I learned from Jim that he saw me as a true sailor and fisherman. He said he was impressed at how I was all business in the face of an ocean that had him scared and truly wondering if he should have brought me out. He said when I broke out that alcohol stove and made the soup he really saw the fiber of my being. I was Gloucester tough, Howard Blackburn tough, and he knew that I could have rowed a dory from the Grand Banks to Nova Scotia if need be. I felt none of these things. I loved the ocean and had no fear of it. This is just who we are from Gloucester: we survive. I have had to sail some pretty rough seas in my life, but none of them were made up of water, but that Gloucester tough got me through them all. I love Jim Shoel for all he exposed me to. He was an awesome teacher but an even better friend who is still in my life today. We did climb those mountains together (Jim and I, along with the PA class, climbed Mt. Kearsarge 3 winters in a row), paddle those rivers, and camp on those islands, but most importantly we traveled this life journey together, ending up in much different places but still together. Someday I hope to take another winter sail with him.

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