



## **Short Diary Of My Residential Sailing Trip On The Solent.**

### **May 2014 With 4 boys Who Have Asperger Syndrome.**

A few weeks ago I took 4 boys on the Autistic Spectrum, aged 11-14 on a sailing and life skills residential trip. We were to sleep onboard a yacht 'Thunderbolt' for 4 nights. With me on the trip was my very able assistant Edd and Paul, the skipper of the boat and joint owner of the sailing school (<http://www.adventuresatsea.org.uk>).

Paul worked closely with Edd and I on our targets for the trip, which were:-

- Learning to live with others in a confined space.
- Learning to share a cabin with another boy.
- Promoting independence in self care.
- Learning to make hot and cold drinks and sandwiches for others.
- Carry out household tasks, e.g. make their bed, keep their cabin tidy etc.
- Learning to steer a 12 metre yacht through one of the busiest waterways in the world.
- Learn to work as a team in every aspect of life on board an ocean going yacht.
- HAVE FUN AND ENJOY THEMSELVES.

The buzz words for the week were "Dynamic Planning". In other words, everything we did was weather and tide dependent, that could change at a moment's notice. To support the boys in coping with plans changing very quickly we used whiteboards which helped.

We also used "visuals" to show them what was on the menu that day, inform them of tasks that needed doing, our sailing destinations and points of interest. We attached these to the walls of the saloon.

We stuck labels on cupboards with pictures and writing detailing their contents. A "big Howto Book" was used to demonstrate how to make, toast, hot and cold drinks and other simple snacks. The book also contained information about how to perform household chores and many more useful routine jobs with easy to follow instructions. The purpose of the book was to help the boys perform tasks as independently as possible.

#### **Diary Day 1**

After driving through monsoon like conditions, we eventually arrived at our yacht, Thunderbolt in Southampton.

The boys quickly settled in, acquainting themselves with life onboard and their new lifestyle for the next few days. They played a getting to know you game, learnt rules for the week, stuck visuals on cupboards and generally settled in. The sun came out so whilst Paul cooked our shepherd's pie we went for a walk along a path that ran parallel to the river Hamble. By the time we got back it was nearly 7pm. Dinner eaten and bedtime routines done, the boys went to bed, but not to sleep. Just gone midnight all was quiet!

## **Day 2**

**The day** dawned bright and sunny. We consulted our charts. Paul said we could sail to Cowes on The Isle of Wight, but we all had to undertake our steering training first after we had scrambled into our “oilys” and life jackets. No playing with the toggle or the life jacket would inflate. We motored out to a quiet stretch of water and practised our steering and manouvering round “buoys” and hauling up and down of sails. When Paul was satisfied with our competence we sailed to Cowes eating lunch on board. On route we witnessed a water spout off Portsmouth (not a tornado like the boys hoped it was). We waved to other wayfarers and everyone took turns at steering.

After we moored up we explored Cowes and in particular an ice cream parlour. One of the boys wanted bubble gum flavour ice cream and YES, they sold it! All the boys made their own concoctions of ice cream with various toppings. Feeling rather full we visited the Max Aitken Museum. (One of the boys has a particular interest in history and we wanted to accommodate the boys own interests in the trip as much as possible.) After walking to the Royal Yacht Squadron counting the mini canons, which are fired to signal the start of each race during Cowes Week we returned to the yacht. As we climbed onboard we noticed a large storm heading our way. Paul told us we had to stay in port until the storm passed. We literally battened down the hatches, cooked our spaghetti bolognaise and watched the storm pass over, then sailed back, getting into our berth about 9.30 that evening.

## **Day 3**

Another sunny day. Today we would sail up the Beaulieu River and moor at Bucklers Hard. The Harbour Master had even given us special permission (thanks to Paul for arranging it) to play football on the green between the historic cottages. We took a very soft plastic ball especially for this! Having moored, we ate lunch, explored its ship building history, visited a chapel, ate more ice cream and played petanque, followed by football. With no windows broken we returned to the yacht for 3 o'clock to catch the tide.

On the way back we played an I Spy/Scattagories game which Edd and a couple of the boys produced. Everyone had to look out for ship names, countries or towns where the ships/boats were registered to, where in the world those places were and favourite task of all - how many pieces of seaweed can you count!

Suddenly, a Sea King helicopter hovered over us and 2 military landing craft swept by us. We saw a person being winched down into one of the landing craft, collect someone and winch them back into the helicopter. The helicopter then circled the landing craft and flew across the Solent. When we got back to the marina and whilst waiting for dinner we played football and noughts and crosses at a local park. Edd introduced the boys to French cricket.

## **Day 4**

Our last full day of sailing dawned, amazingly it was still sunny and warm. We set sail for Southampton and the container port. We passed many oil tankers refueling at Fawley. Spotted

hovercrafts, both military and commercial together with numerous pleasure and commercial vessels.

After mooring at Southampton for lunch, the boys went off to a local park to play football, petanque and buy their last ice cream of the trip. We then motored for our final and most jaw-dropping part of the week – visiting the container port. We observed every kind of 4 wheeled vehicle you could think of being driven onto “shoebox ships”. Multi storey car parks were full of vehicles waiting to be loaded and some of the largest container ships in the world being unloaded by enormous cranes. We sailed as close as was safe to do so. The boys were thrilled when one of the crane drivers returned their waves! We wondered if the iPads, DS and other devices they had with them were transported in containers just like the ones we were watching. Where in the world are the countries of Japan, China, Thailand where many of their devices are manufactured? How long would it take for a container ship to reach Southampton from these countries? Etc etc Even, what happens if he forgets his lunch when he is up in the crane!

On the way back to the marina the boys packed their bags ready for their last night. By 10 o'clock they were all asleep, marvelous! – we had finally worn them out.

## **Day 5**

After much chatting, thank yous and goodbyes we drove back to Sussex. The minibus was very quiet on the way back with 2 of the boys fast asleep.

**Were the targets met? Yes. Over and above expectations.**

**Did the boys enjoy themselves? Yes. All of them asked if we could do it again.**

**One of the boys thought at the beginning of the week that he didn't think 7 people could live in such a small space, however by Friday he said, “yes, there was enough space” and “can we do it again please”.**

**All the boys are now expert tea makers and make a mean sandwich AND CAN keep their beds and belongings tidy.**

**At the end of the day everyone had their own downtime. My own reflections were how lovely it was to see the boys choose to share and play on each other's electronic devices It was great to see them sitting together in the mornings drinking tea and (which they had made themselves) and chatting. Evening sailing on the Solent and Hamble will always hold a special memory for me with all the boys taking turns at steering, putting out and bringing in the fenders and ultimately listening and following Paul's patient instructions. Every boy achieved and Paul, Edd and I have listed what these achievements were and have sent them to their parents.**