

# Maiden Voyages

## LEARNING TO LAUNCH FROM SOMEONE OTHER THAN THE SIGNIFICANT OTHER CAN MAKE FOR SMOOTH SAILING

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
LAURA WATILO BLAKE

Have you ever asked your spouse to teach you how to do something and all it produced was a lot of frustration? For some women, learning how to operate a watercraft is no exception. Last year, the online magazine *Mad Mariner* polled 400 boaters—200 men and 200 women—about their on-board habits. According to the survey, approximately one third of the female respondents said a spouse or friend had yelled at them while trying to perform boating skills.

Even if a naval battle doesn't break out on the high seas, spouses are sometimes just not the best instructors. "My spouse is a great sailor, but not a teacher," says Jenny Spires, "so taking lessons from someone else is the best way for me to learn."

After she and her husband bought a sailboat two years ago, Spires signed up for a sailing clinic geared just for women at Harbor North Marina—home to one of the oldest sailing schools on Lake Erie—in Huron, Ohio.

"I found it easier to learn in an all-women environment because men can be so fearless," says Spires, who has been trying to overcome a fear of the water that has plagued her throughout her life. "It's intimidating to me."

Boating courses for women are more widely

available now than in the past. Harbor North's program started when a group of customers, who were docked at the marina, asked for instruction on their own boats. Almost 20 years later, the program has expanded to a wider audience, and the number of participants each year has grown from just a few to as many as 30.

Over the course of a weekend in June, students begin by learning basic boating terms, which for novices is a bit like learning a foreign language. But by the end of the clinic, they can understand how—and more importantly *know* how—to tack and jibe with the best of them. Furthermore, they have learned how to trim sails, dock a boat, and perform "man overboard" drills.

Harbor North's sailing school manager, T. J. Wright, provides a variety of instructors to the students during the weekend class so they can experience different teaching styles. "One instructor might show you one way to do something, but another may present it in a different way that just clicks," he says.

Captain Jill Hautzenroeder always starts her training sessions by asking each student two questions: "What is your biggest fear when it comes to sailing?" and "What did you hope to achieve today?" She says the answers help her to adapt her



◀ "I walked away with the attitude, I can do this."

*Toni Brown, Worthington, OH*



◀ "I can actually take control over the boat and I give myself more credit than I did beforehand."

*Dianne Mendat, 30, Sharon Center, OH*



“The most important lesson I took away is that I can do this! I can sail.”

*Jenny Spires, 53, Mansfield, OH*



“You can learn a whole lot of little things a few at a time, and pretty soon you’ll have a fair amount of competency.”

*Penny Johnson, 54, Parma, OH*



## tie the KNOT

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training accordingly. "So many women have fears, but don't tell anybody or work through them," she says. "My goal is to get more women out on the water by making them more comfortable."

Fear, in fact, is what motivated Sharon Miller of Huron, Ohio, to sign up for Women's Sailing Weekend. "I want to be able to do this myself," she explains. "I don't mean to be morbid, but what if something would happen to my spouse? I don't want to say, 'I wish I would have learned.'"

Miller, who has owned boats throughout her married life, never really learned how to confidently take the helm. "When I'm with males on a boat, they just take over and do everything," says Miller. "I didn't really know that I could do it, because I didn't necessarily have an opportunity to even try. But, shame on me for deferring to them."

After performing only a few of the boating drills under Hautzenroeder's direction, Miller felt more secure on the water. "I can feel my self-confidence building," she says. "I actually feel it's not

hard to figure it out. It's not rocket science."

While learning the basics of sailing is relatively easy, becoming an expert can take many years of practice. Women's Sailing Weekend, however, seemed to bring out the confidence needed to pursue the skills. "I had hoped to become more comfortable with sailing and to learn how to handle all aspects of it," says Spires. "Not only did I achieve that, but I've also become excited about sailing and now look forward to every opportunity."

For participant Dianne Mendat, it also brought a big life change. The 30-year-old from Sharon Center, Ohio, reports that since last year's class, she and her husband have not only bought a bigger boat, they now have the house up for sale and are hoping to move to Fort Myers, Florida, to take over a charter sailing business. "My husband is getting his captain's license next month. This is all because I went to this sailing school to learn and look what it's done!"

*More on what the women had to say at [lakeerieliving.com](http://lakeerieliving.com). ☺*

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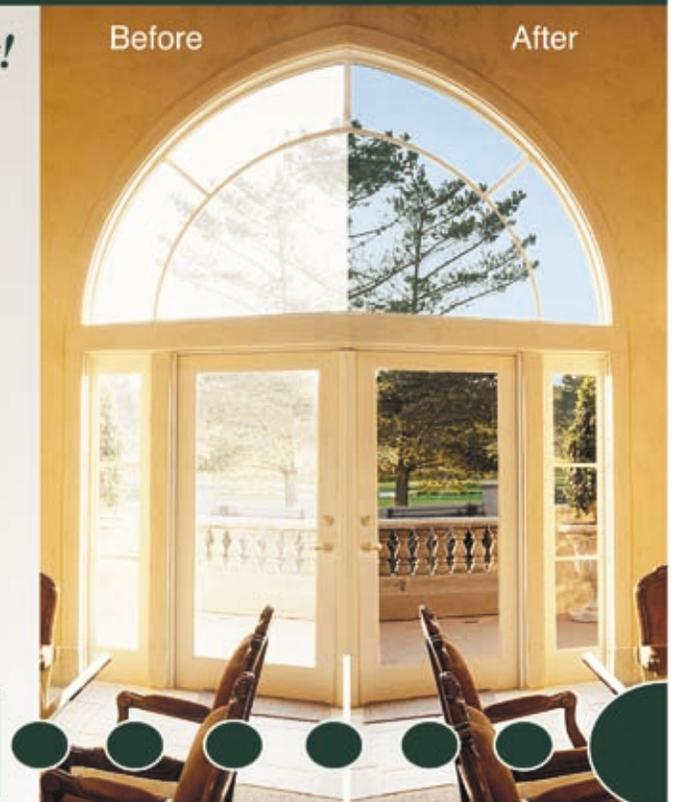
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Before

After



*T.J. Wright, who leads the Women's Sailing Weekend, also serves as chef. Wright lives on his boat year-round and has mastered the art of grilling quick, gourmet meals. Here he prepares pineapple marinated in Italian dressing and seasoned with cinnamon. It's then drizzled with chocolate sauce and topped with a cherry.*



*Sharon Miller of Huron, Ohio, says she feels more confident after participating in Harbor North's Women's Sailing Weekend, two days of sail training designed for women only.*

## Info to Go

### Women's Sailing Weekend

June 6-8, 2009

Harbor North

400 Huron St.

Huron, OH

(419) 433-4906

harbornorth.com

Cost: \$250 for two days of instruction, meals, and two nights lodging aboard a midsize sailboat. The weekend kicks off with a "Meet the Crew" wine and cheese event on Friday night.



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for more information about  
Put-in-Bay activities and events.

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## PIRATE FEST WEEKEND

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AROUND THE ISLANDS

Spend four hours learning the ropes aboard Niagara as you help sail the brig around the Bass Islands. Join the crew for a typical meal aboard ship before returning to port at Put-in-Bay.

**Ship Tours** on June 26, 11 am to 3 pm June 27, 11 am to 3 pm

**Day Sails** on June 26, 4 pm to 9 pm (meal aboard ship)

June 27, 4 pm to 9 pm (meal aboard ship)

June 28, 4 pm to 9 pm (meal aboard ship)

Day Sail Tickets are limited to 50 people per Training Sail. Cost is \$100 per person. Receive a \$25 discount on your ticket if you bring five crushed Pepsi cans for Pepsi's "Keep Put-in-Bay Green & Clean" recycling drive.

Can't make the trip in June? Niagara will return in August for three more days of tours and Day Sails.

For more information on Niagara's visit to Put-in-Bay this summer, or to order tickets for an upcoming Day Sail Training Session, visit us online at [put-in-bay.com](http://put-in-bay.com) or [visitputinbay.com](http://visitputinbay.com).

Would you like to spend two to four weeks this summer crewing aboard Niagara and receive training in sailing square rigged sailing ships? You can join the crew aboard this historic vessel and sail Lake Erie for \$1,200 a person. Visit [put-in-bay.com](http://put-in-bay.com) or the Erie Maritime Museum's website, [brigniagara.org](http://brigniagara.org) for more information and an application form.

Miller  
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