

## Essay:

Have you ever told someone a story and upon the conclusion you blurt out "You just had to be there!" That's the way most of my stories concerning sailing have played out.

My sailing career first started at the age of seven. I would go out with my grandfather on his Beetle Cat taking many trips across the Quonochontaug Pond. The pond is home to the Weekapaug Yacht Club: where my family spends our summers. I competed at the yacht club until I was seventeen and sailed multiple boats: Optimis, 420's and occasionally the Lasers. In those years I mainly raced the 420's, going to several regattas each summer and sailing on the Weekapaug Race Team. These regattas were mostly around Connecticut and Rhode Island and even at SUNY Maritime a couple times, right underneath the Throggs Neck Bridge in New York. As for the race team, we would engage in team racing with surrounding yacht clubs every week with the top two clubs from each division being invited to Yale University for the championship. In 2011 we finished in first, and the following year in 2012 we finished in second.

After I aged out of the program I became an instructor at the yacht club, and continue that job this summer. I have just completed my sophomore year at the College of Charleston. Ever since I enrolled there I always had the hopes of sailing for one of the best sailing teams in the country. Unfortunately, I did not make the team my freshman year or earlier this year as a sophomore. However, these past two years I have sailed for the College of Charleston Sailing Development Team. Learning a great deal these past two years on the team, I have made it my ultimate goal to make the varsity team before I graduate. I am working towards it every time I sail.

I mentioned before that no one can really relate to a sailing story unless they've actually sailed. When you talk about sailing to a non-sailor it seems as if they have this preconceived notion that sailing is just sitting on a boat floating around, or in other words, a lackadaisical sport. Don't get me wrong; there are rare occasions when the wind is just too fussy to maintain a steady breeze. Although, more often than not the wind is unrelenting and you must fight just to keep the boat from heeling over. This particular case occurred in 2011 when I was competing in Narragansett Bay Race Week with my buddy Mike. We were racing in a 420.

The first day was wild to say the least. Postponement loomed throughout the racecourse, boats floating aimlessly in the spiraling current. After going over some tactics and boat handling with our coach, Andrew, something appeared far out in the mouth of the bay: the sea breeze. Within minutes our sails fluttered in the now present gust; deafening noises resonating through our ears while the sails cracked back and forth. With a few short bursts from race committee the first day was about to commence. The line was as packed as a beach on the fourth of July. Around fifty boats zoomed past each other on the crowded line. Mike and I wanted to start towards the pin and try to get some current relief on the right side of the course, and apparently everyone else did too. The race finally began when the gun sounded. The windward mark was nearly impossible to see with all the white caps (we would later find out that the first leg was a mile long). I immediately hooked myself onto

the trapeze to level the boat. The trapeze is one of my favorite parts of the 420. You hover over the water by a wire, there's no other feeling better than absorbing the ensuing salty, spray as you look for nearby boats. I love it. Every tack I trapped on the upwind leg. We were towards the top of the fleet; my legs were as stiff as a pair of new shoes. White trails of salt appeared on my hat, indicative of the amount of water I was luckily shielding Mike from.

As we approached the windward mark I swooped back into the boat and readied the spinnaker; some of the boats had already popped their chutes. The whole downwind leg looked like a carnival with all the different colored spinnakers. Mike and I rounded the mark and yanked up the distinct third sail. I grabbed the spin sheets and was immediately tugged forward as we drastically gained speed. We were splitting the oncoming white caps in two. Our boat looked as if it had grown wings on the port and starboard sides from the water's mist. Due to the fact that we were sailing on a reach we were going considerably fast, so fast that we couldn't keep the boat flat. Leaning over ever so carefully I hooked into the trapeze once more. Using my legs I pushed myself out onto the starboard ledge of the boat. Now this, this was sailing. Our boat sluggishly evened itself out. I know some people might think that the trapeze is dangerous, and it is, don't get me wrong, but once you perfect it nothing compares to it. Floating, really, above the churning water below, I focused on keeping the spinnaker full. The bubbly blue and bland black colors glimmered with the repeated splash of the water. This moment, this is what sailing means to me. Excitement, intensity, competitiveness, and most importantly, getting wet. Mike and I went on to finish in the top fifteen that first day.

One can utilize all the descriptive language he or she likes to describe their perfect sailing scenario. But the fact is, you can make it sound real, but nothing will capture the true passion, and thrill of the sport as much as being on the water for oneself. I hope my recollection and features of this particular race allow you to come as close as possible to the enjoyment and vigor of this sport, without getting wet of course. I know I had a blast this day, and it's a shame some people cannot experience sailing at this level like I do.