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### The Weekapaug Yacht Club: Old and New

Somewhere along the coast of eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island lies the town of Westerly, a town that is home to many fire districts, one being Weekapaug, just a few miles away from Taylor Swift's house in Watch Hill, I might add. There are many telltale signs of the snug, little neighborhood: the inlet shop positioned appropriately across from the beach, the two jetties forming the breach way, and, last but not least, the Weekapaug Yacht Club.

Along the water's edge the slender, strands of grass wave to and fro. Every now and then, the boats cannot make up their mind, for they turn back and forth in unison with the wind. The occasional rev of the engine can be heard on the motorboat dock, while the voices of young sailors echo from the launching ramp to first pond – a perfect summer day. As an instructor, this is quite an amazing and humbling sight. Nestled on the Quonochontaug Pond stands the Weekapaug Yacht Club, one of the oldest yacht clubs in America (opened in 1893). It is here where I learned to sail.

My grandparents own a house nearby the yacht club so my mother would spend every summer up in New England enrolled in sailing lessons. This rite of passage was eventually handed down to my brother and me, and for as long as we can remember we have spent our summers up there, improving our sailing skills at the yacht club. When I aged out of competing under the yacht club, I was hired as an instructor; I had come full circle. If there has been one thing I have noticed throughout my years at the yacht club, especially as an instructor, it is that

there is an enormous alumni presence; it is amazing to see the seasoned sailors out every Sunday racing with the younger ones. The older sailors care so much about the yacht club it is indescribable; they are always doing work on the club, whether it is replacing the siding or repairing boats. Keep in mind they are not paid, they just care that much about the sport and what this yacht club represents. To this day my mother still sees people she took lessons with, and one of her former instructors, is a consistent racer every Sunday at the yacht club in addition to doing maintenance. However, I have never seen a better example of this strong alumni presence than what I witnessed at the Leo Telesmanick Regatta this past summer.

Earlier this summer I raced in a regatta; it only happens every three years, so as you could imagine, it was a pretty big deal. Sailors from all over New England gather at our tiny club, raising their sails on the pond. One by one, a plain white sail flaps up into the wind, then a green and yellow striped one, then a blue and red one. It looked as if a rainbow was stemming from the water. For the regatta I am sailing with my former coach, who also happens to sail for the Boston College team. Throughout the two days we raced against many yacht club members, some new and some old. It is things like that that make me appreciate what I have become a part of.

The two days consisted of heavy wind, and even some rain at certain points. Despite all the salty, spray of the water, the Weekapaug sailors maintained good sportsmanship throughout the two days. Like any other sport, communication is essential for sailing; pointing out better wind pressure, looking out for other boats, just talking with their crew or skipper about strategy. Sailing is not a one-man sport. We would talk with the other Weekapaug sailors about which side of the course was better.

At the end of the regatta, all of the sailors, the families of the sailors, and friends of the yacht club were present at the awards. As this was going on, the younger sailors were rigging their boats for the imminent Sunday races. After the top three places were announced, I discussed the racing with one of the former commodores of the club. He, like myself, also was a part of the College of Charleston sailing team. Here I am talking to a College of Charleston alumni, I couldn't help but notice the younger sailors launching; former sailors and ones that had just raced helped out the young racers. The yacht club brings so many people together: new faces, old friends, alumni. There is really no better way to describe it than the scene after the regatta.

Parents walked back and forth along the crunchy gravel as they waved goodbye to their racers. Instructors at the club spoke with visiting sailors as the wind raged angrily through the afternoon. I sat in my car for what seemed like a while as I watched the scene unravel before me: generations of Weekapaug sailors right before my eyes. I put the car in reverse and pulled out of the parking lot; boats on trailers driving ahead of me. I drove about fifty yards and decided to turn back. I re-entered the bumpy lot, taking a quick picture of the scene. It had not changed a bit. Boats raced out of the harbor eager to get to the racecourse, just the way I left it. Seasoned sailors helping new ones; communication and teamwork being exemplified throughout, isn't that what sailing is all about? Sailing requires constant communication and collaboration. I smiled to myself and exited the lot one last time.