

My voyage on “Stavros S Niarchos” – October 2007

By Graham Pascoe

I had a fairly good idea of what life would be like on board the Stavros before I set off. My eldest daughter had been on a voyage some 5 years previously, and we had talked at some length about life on board.

However, nothing prepared me for the intensity of the experience. As with all new adventures there were issues at the back of my mind. How would I cope in a group of complete strangers in such confined quarters? Would everybody else have more knowledge and experience of sailing than me? Would I be okay with the rigours of climbing the masts?

During the voyage I found the answers to all these questions. As we boarded we were allocated into our respective watches – 16 per watch divided into 2 cabins of 8 bunks. Each watch had a volunteer watch leader. A pipe bunk, slightly wider than the human body, surrounded by curtains, a slim cupboard and drawer unit plus an under-bunk storage box was to become home for the next week! There was no room for privacy, so having bumped (literally) into everyone within 10 minutes, introductions and names were soon exchanged.

Although some people had more sailing experience, it soon became obvious that with all the different duties and tasks that were allotted, we would all be in the same boat (again literally!) and at the same level. It soon occurred to me that these people were to be my team for the week, and living so closely together tolerance and consideration would be needed.

With the ship's full and busy programme, organisation was of key importance - showering as and when time permitted, suitable clothing ready for the next duties, making full use of rest and relaxation time, getting to the front of the meal queue!

Within a couple of days I noticed our watch had turned into quite a tight group of new friends. People started looking out for one another, helping with and checking each others harnesses etc., asking if colleagues were OK. These changes happened in a fairly quick, but subtle way. A pride in our watch and a keenness for us to perform well became obvious. We wanted our watch to be thought well of by others. There were also opportunities for individuals to learn new skills which I took full advantage of. Deep and long lasting friendships were also made as addresses and email addresses were exchanged.

The mast climbing and rigging work was learnt surprisingly quickly, but in a safe and methodical manner with no pressure put on to anybody other than that imposed by the individual. The emphasis being put on safety and working within your own limits, but as in all worthwhile achievements your limits must be explored.

With the help and guidance of “Rocky” – one of the watch leaders – I climbed to the top of the mast whilst moored at Fowey, and later had two amazing, exhilarating experiences taking the sails down at night in fairly high wind. Brilliant!

My questions had been answered, I left the “Stavros” having experienced the journey of a lifetime with new friends, new skills and improved self- belief (and possibly slightly taller!!).