

## CANADIAN EXCHANGE 2010

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I would like to start by saying a thank you to OYT South for putting me forward to go on the International Exchange program.

On arriving at the airport I was met by Imelda. As we rushed through passport control and checked our bags it became apparent that we were actually going to go sailing on the Great Lakes. We boarded the plane and we were off. Almost as quick as we had left, it seemed we were only in the air for a short time and we were there.

We got our baggage and headed out to meet a mystery person who was going to pick us up. After only a short while we were met by Sue Taggaress who was taking us to stop with Karen. When we got there the heat was incredible and there was a buzz of big city sounds which I was not used to, we went up to the flat we were going to be stopping in which was very nice and we were made to feel extremely welcome.

Shortly after sitting down a sudden tiredness hit so we headed off to get some sleep, which must have been very much needed as we slept for a long time. The next morning it became apparent that Imelda was not well and unfortunately, as it turned out, she was unable to continue with the trip.

The next day I went out with Karen and met up with one of her friends, we went all around the city, saw lots of street shows and amazing places. Then we went to a place just a short tube trip away, out of the city, to a place called Cenzington market to a reggae festival which I found totally amazing and spent the night partying with the locals. The next morning was the day I was finally going to meet the boat.

We set off to meet the bus, the drive seemed to take for ever but eventually we pulled up in a huge car park where lots of people were gathering waiting for the bus. We stood chatting and getting to know each other. After a few minutes the bus pulled up - it was a big American style yellow school bus. This excited me because I have seen them in movies and always wanted to go on one. We started loading supplies on to the bus and then all of the bags. We all hopped on to the bus and settled down for a five hour ride. It was very quiet at first and no one was really talking but this didn't last long before every one was starting to bond.

As the bus pulled up at Tobermory every one started to cheer as we could see the rig of Playfair and Pathfinder, they were not at all what I had expected but very nice looking all the same. We unloaded every thing off the bus and gathered to get split into the two crews and to meet our Petty Officers and the rest of the crew. During this time I got made a member of the crew on Playfair and made a Petty Officer. As we were starting to stow all of the supplies I got shown around the boat by Speed who was the cook.

As we had two days in Tobermory, waiting for a weather window to leave in, we were allowed to spend the day ashore to look around. I spent the day with the crew that I was going to be working alongside and it became apparent that we were going to have a very good relationship working together and socialising. The next morning we were off heading for Drumend but this time the wind had dropped right off so we had to motor a lot of the way. After a few hours I

remarked to the captain that she wasn't sounding very well because the engine sounded like it was hunting for fuel, they said it was having a problem with the lift pump but it was all ok for now. After the first night watch it was starting to hit home just how big the Great Lakes actually are as we had made a lot of miles but we hadn't covered a quarter of the distance to the next stop. Thankfully the wind started to fill in and in a good direction so we headed aloft to drop the main and the top sail, this was my first experience of handling a square sail. Once we got them set the boat felt completely different, it came to life and powered on towards Mackinack Island.

After five days and 4 nights we got there early in the morning. We were going to spend a couple of days here to do some work on the boat and let us enjoy some of the places to go and explore. We spent a day swimming in a cove and the lake water was surprisingly warm, whilst cooking on fires along with helping prep the boat for the next passage.

I spent a day with Captain Weed learning how to read Mayfair forecast. As it is given in numerical codes in each area so you write the code down and look it up in a manual that had all the meanings for the numbers so that you could convert the codes into a forecast - this took a bit of getting used to. We all mustered around the boat at 12:30 to do roll call and set off. We slipped lines at the same time as pathfinder and sailed out of the marina at the same time with passers by looking and shouting as we were climbing along the yards

We were heading for S'charlvoix which was going to take 7 days. This was the part of the journey that was going to be the hardest, as there were strong wind warnings, but we had to push on to get to a good point to head for Chicago. The strong wind warning was very accurate as it came in with a squall that meant the boat was getting blown almost flat at points this was a worry as we had to go aloft to reef the main and the course. At this point I had such an adrenalin rush it didn't seem a problem but once we got up there I was beginning to feel unsure but we carried on and got a double reef in both, this made the boat much easier to control.

The fact that I was on a lake didn't seem relevant now as I was beginning to see that although there was no tide the lakes still got a huge sea like swell and some real big dumpy waves.

Because we had some problems on the way to Chicago we were running a day late and Pathfinder was already there and we were being told we would lose our space, in the event we arrived late on the 8<sup>th</sup> day just in the nick of time. This meant we could empty the black and gray water tanks and fill up with fresh water.

We had 5 days to enjoy Chicago and the Tall Ships Festival in between doing deck tours. The festival was totally awesome, there was so much going on and so many people it was unforgettable. Navy pier was a fabulous place to host the event as it was huge but all the ships, big and small, were in the same place and there were lots of other attractions around. There was a crew room in the main events building where there were showers, a lounge and internet access. That was where we went for breakfast, lunch and dinner- all supplied for the crew of every boat. This was a great place to meet people from other boats and exchange e-mail addresses with the hope of getting to look around other boats.

I had a whole day of shore leave with some of the other crew so we decided to go and explore the big city. We got on to one of the street cars to the mall as we got public transport free with the event pass. I have never seen a shopping centre like it, huge! One of the funniest memories of the time in Chicago was going to the Lego store where you could ride around in huge Lego cars, we got a bit childish as we spent hours there. After we left we walked along the waters edge to a small off crop of land where we spent hours relaxing and joking around, this made a real bond in our friendship which I know will last a long time as I am still in contact with all of the crew.

After five days of partying in Chicago we were getting ready to depart again. We were almost set to leave when we realised that we were not going to be able to carry enough water because of the condition of the tanks so we held on for another day to allow us to go and buy huge bottles of water.

We left a day behind Pathfinder but this time we had chosen a better route for the wind direction and we had the other boat in our sights by the evening and we were setting more and more sail all the time. By the early morning we were under full sail and I could feel the boat come to life and really be able to start to appreciate square sail. On the way along the whole length of the longest lake of all, Lake Superior, the miles were racking up all the time. The days were flying by as we were having such a fantastic time it was like sailing with a bunch of people that I had known for years and years.

We arrived back in Canadian waters and arrived into Godrich which was a big industrial port situated on a salt mine. The town was only a short walk up a woodland path and we were allowed to spend the whole first day looking around. It was a nice small community town with lots of small stores and diners. The first night a strong wind started to blow up from the east and the port was open to this direction so a large swell was starting to run in to the port entrance. This meant that the boats were taking a battering and kept parting lines. We worked all night to keep the boats secure, adding lots of additional lines and chafe gear to stop the lines fraying on the concrete of the pier. The next morning it began to settle down and we were allowed to go and get washed and changed in our watches.

We arrived back on board to start the Captains clean up, I had thought this would take a long time as we had a lot to do but after about 2 hours Captain Weed came below and said that it was a good job and to stop and pack our bags as the bus was on its way. We went, packed all of our gear up and put it ashore and waited for the bus. Everyone was a bit down as for the crew it was going to be the last sail of the season and the last time they would sail with Captain Weed as he was finishing working for Toronto Brigantine.

As the bus pulled up it was decided that, as a leaving present we would all sing the ship's song and at the end of it all Weed was pushed into the water which was taken in good spirit by all. As we got on to the bus there was lots of waving and shouting as we departed, I was sad to be leaving as my time in Canada was coming to an end. On the bus trip home we were swapping e-mail addresses so that we could all keep in contact.

We arrived back in Toronto where I was met by Sue Taggaress who I was going to be stopping with for the rest of my time in Canada. On the first evening back we had a Bbq and a party with lots of the committee members from Toronto Brigantine. It was a fantastic evening and it went on until the early hours of the morning. The next evening I went shopping with Noimmiki who is Sue's eldest daughter this was a great day as I got to see Toronto at a weekend when everyone was out doing their thing and meeting with lots of people.

The next morning Sue took me to the airport and saw me off with the gift of a set of worry beads as her husband was a Greek and thinks everyone should have some. I boarded the plane and that was it, my trip was over which was sad but I was looking forward to getting back home to seeing friends and colleagues.

I would like to thank ASTO for giving me this fantastic opportunity to go and see a different country and sail on an amazing boat with some truly amazing people and gain some friends that I have kept in contact with and will be going to visit again in the near future.

Yours gratefully

Brendan Stewart.