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BOLTON,

Jim

'Different terms' with death now

Bol - Brig (col)
**Local student
sailed aboard
brigantine ship**

By Jack Evans

The Intelligencer

The sea can do strange things to a person, Jim Bolton has discovered.

On his first ocean sailing trip this past fall, Bolton, 24, a young man barely out of university, found himself pondering his own death.

"I've come to a whole new understanding of death; I'm on different terms with it now," he reflected as he recalled survival in a North Atlantic storm.

"There were times I really thought the ship would not make it and I would not make it. I didn't believe the sea could be so rough and a large ship could be so vulnerable."

Bolton, son of Loyalist College teacher and sailing enthusiast John Bolton of Rossmore, had plenty of experience on his father's boats when he became enamored with the 110-foot long Fair Jeanne sail training brigantine which put in an appearance at the Prince Edward Yacht Club boat show at Picton last Thanksgiving weekend.

Before it could start winter Caribbean cruises — it sails the Great Lakes during summers — it had to go to Irvington, Virginia, for a refit.

So when Jim and his father toured the tall ship at Picton, he saw a sign advertising for crew for the November trip, expected to take 15 to 18 days.

"I had been saving some money and was planning a holiday trip to Africa, but I signed on instead for the trip. At first they said the crew was full, but the day I was going to buy my plane ticket to Africa, the skipper called and said they'd had a cancellation, so I went."

Even allowing a couple of extra days from what was expected, the trip took a full 20 days, he said. While he had sailed with his father on the Bay of Quinte many times, "It was my first time at sea, and I spent most of it on the verge of seasickness," Bolton admitted.

He was one of a crew of 21, including experienced officers plus volunteer crew members ranging in age from 19 to 73. The 73-year-old, also making his first big-vessel voyage, was an experienced ocean-sailing skipper in his own small yacht, "and was one of the most valuable crew members on the trip," said Bolton.

With rigging towering more than five storeys above the deck, crew members were expected to learn furling and unfurling of all 12 sails, steering, some basic navigation and other seagoing skills.

"Each sail had about four separate sheets to furl or control it, so we had to learn about 50 different lines to start with," he explained.

Learning how to handle oneself in difficult situations such as a listing top yard or a bowsprit pitching violently 60 feet up and down was also part of it. "You just decided you had to do your job and get on with it," he said.

But there were also idyllic times, sitting at the topmost point of the mast and hypnotized by the spreads of sail and blue sky, and sailing triumphantly into Halifax harbor with replica canons blazing blanks.

Just off Prince Edward Island, the Fair Jeanne ran into her first full-blown gale, which exposed crew members to their first bout of seasickness — or close to it. "I didn't really get it but I was queasy for the entire storm," he said.

Since most were newcomers, a couple of days in port at Halifax was an occasion to enjoy survivors' camaraderie. "It's a great place," commented Bolton.

But out of Halifax a force 10 Atlantic storm was lurking, catching up the boat for a full 36 hours of helpless drifting off course, followed by hours more of "slop," the even

more totally confused seas which follow a heavy storm.

"Our steering cables broke and we had to rig emergency block and tackle steering directly from the rudder. Sails ripped. We had no food for two days because you couldn't do anything in the galley. It made the gale off Prince Edward Island seem like a breeze."

When the storm finally died, the skipper decided to "make for the nearest point of land as another storm was predicted after 36 hours."

Using full motor power, the ship struggled to reach shore, and within sight of land, it was obvious the ship was barely maintaining course against rising winds which threatened to smash it on nearby reefs. "The skipper ordered all hands into lifejackets and stand by on deck. But we inched our way enough until we hit calm water and anchored."

They waited another two days until the storm abated enough to complete their journey, a full two days later than expected.

Despite unexpectedly dangerous and terrifying experiences, "I'd recommend a sailing trip at sea to anyone," said Bolton. "I want to buy my own boat and do a lot more sailing on the Great Lakes."

Those interested in youth sail training or charter cruises aboard the Fair Jeanne can telephone Bytown Brigantine, Ottawa, (613) 596-6258.

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