

Outpost 001 students experience the thrill of a lifetime

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Contributing Writer

Growing up in Scotland in the late 1800's, a young man might have been privileged to apprentice for those building the tall ship, Elissa. As soon as she was seaworthy and set sail for the open seas, he may have longed to stow away, just for the adventure of sailing to the Americas aboard her helm. But if the young man was one of the fortunate Outpost 001 students growing up in the Galveston area in the year 2000, he may actually have a chance to call himself a deckhand on the 120 year old sailing vessel.

At least that's what students in the Youth Educational Support Services (YESS) program were allowed to do. The program, part of Bridgeport Communities In Schools, is for young people enrolled in the Clear Creek Independent School System who may need help with confidence and self-esteem. Founded by Dr. Huey Barnett in 1989, YESS and Outpost 001 were begun to encourage those young people, both boys and girls, who are particularly interested in sailing.

These fortunate boys and girls were among the 100 or so guests who sailed on the square rigger this year and experienced the thrill of a lifetime.

Dr. Barnett, crew members, and 18 teenagers braved the stinging rain and high winds for a chance to haul rope and test their sea legs as the Elissa set her mainsail and headed into the wind.

The teenagers trained one Saturday a month for seven months to learn all they could about sailing the authentic vessel before going aboard, Barnett said.

The Elissa was built in Scotland in 1877 as a medium sized rig to haul cargo such as bananas, cotton, or lumber. She sailed into Texas waters, sighting Galveston for the first time on December 26, 1883 and returned again in 1886.

Safe in Norwegian waters when Galveston was experiencing the hurricane of 1900, the deadliest hurricane in history, the Elissa sailed under the name of Fjeld. She continued to be bought and sold, going through four more name changes and five more owners before being purchased by the Galveston Historical foundation for the sum of \$40,000 in 1975. She even went through a stint as an actual smuggling ship which gives her past the adventurous flavor of the pirate ships.

The fortunate restoration team, who would make the Elissa seaworthy once more, traveled to Pireaus, Greece to begin the process of renovation.

Twenty-five percent of her original iron hull was replaced and the vessel was renewed in painstaking detail. The restored Elissa sailed back into Galveston harbor in 1982, almost 100 years since her first visit to our shores.

Now, her cargo consists of the many who walk her decks as guests for the day trips into the Bay. Students watch their confidence soar after conquering the high seas aboard a vintage sailing ship.

"The Elissa is really awesome," said 13-year-old, Chad Recchia who sailed with the crew earlier this year. "There is so much going on and so much to do, but you really feel like you are helping to sail the boat. I didn't feel like I was in the way. A few times, I thought we were going to tip over, especially when we made wide turns, but we didn't."

Chad's twin brother, Kyle, expressed similar sentiments about the adventure when he said, "It was awesome. It makes you feel really good to help with the ropes and sails. I was just glad I didn't get sick like I thought I would."

All the young people on board said they wanted to sail on the vessel

again and hope to be able to do so in the future.

After a lunch of soup and sandwiches prepared and served by the Galley crew and the typical seasickness by some, the ship and crew made their way back to port.

With the Elissa's mainsail reaching to the heavens and her hull slicing through the waves, for just a few hours, those on board were transported back in time to the days of wind driven ships and high seas adventure.