

Hard-Working Kids: KEEPING US AFLOAT

by Lorraine Escher

I live with my husband, Rick, and our four kids on a St. Francis 50 catamaran called *Aphrodite*. Our kids are Betty (age 11), Paul (age nine) and twins, Henry and Karen (age six). We are currently in Grenada for hurricane season. We started our adventure in August 2015. For the past two years, we have sailed from Florida to the Bahamas, and on to the Turks & Caicos, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and the Leeward and Windward Islands.



Clockwise from above: Karen and Henry hang up laundry in Admiralty Bay, Bequia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines; Rick and Lorraine Escher at Carnival 2017 in Grenada; Lorraine Escher with her four children in Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe

My children are wild and eager to learn and explore their limits. They love visiting local libraries and exploring the towns and markets ashore. Onboard, they swing off our transom from the topping lift and jump from the sail bag when we're not looking. They like to swim and play with other children. Yet, left to their own devices, they'd happily remain below deck all day playing Minecraft.

There are many facets to this cruising lifestyle that benefit our kids. I want to concentrate on an aspect that is often glossed over — work, hard work. Every soul with a boat knows this. Even as they sip a beer beneath a tiki hut, there's always that small voice calling.

Attitudes and values regarding work are learned. I want to challenge my kids so that they can greet their work with optimism and organization. My husband and I have thought about instilling healthy attitudes towards



work for as long as I can remember. We tell our kids, "You can do hard things" and "Don't say can't".

A few weeks ago I read *The Vanishing American Adult* by Ben Sasse. His ideas resonated with me and relate to raising our kids afloat. Sasse writes:

"Almost everyone interesting I've ever met has a substantive and passionate answer to the question: 'What was the first really hard work you did as a kid?' Bizarrely, our culture is now trying to *protect* kids from similar hard experiences."

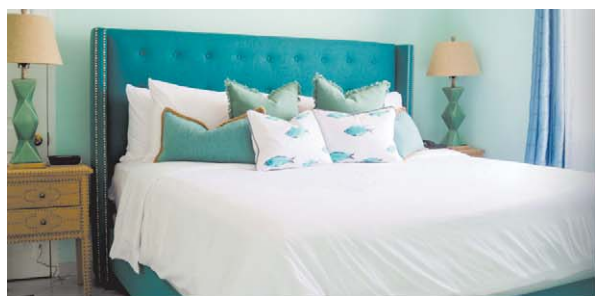
My husband was an entrepreneur. His dad was an entrepreneur, and his whole family seems to exist on self-reliance. They like to help each other. Family visits back home included visits to museums, but also bagging 70 bags of leaves, digging up a garden, and build-

ing a set of stairs. When they don't know what they are doing, they read books, they talk to people, and they learn as they go.

It's been a learning experience for my husband and me to see our children become so important to running our boat. They're young, so we clearly need to teach them, and direct their efforts. But slowly, day by day, they are learning, taking on more responsibility and showing initiative. They have jobs that they like, and jobs that they don't like at all.

We ask our older kids to check oil levels and align the rudders and we give them routine cleaning jobs. They clean the bilges, the engines and the engine compartments, as well as our swim ladders.

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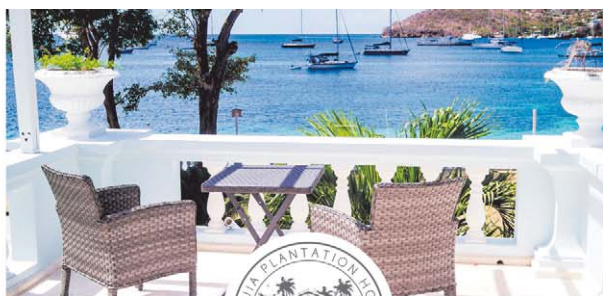


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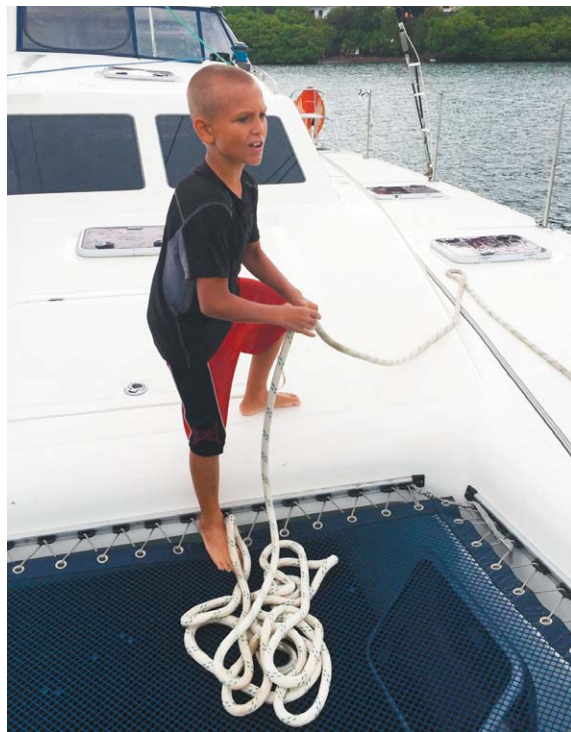
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 Usually Betty cleans one side of the boat, and Paul the other. They are learning much more than how to use a bucket and elbow grease. We hope they are learning teamwork and pride of ownership for a job well done.

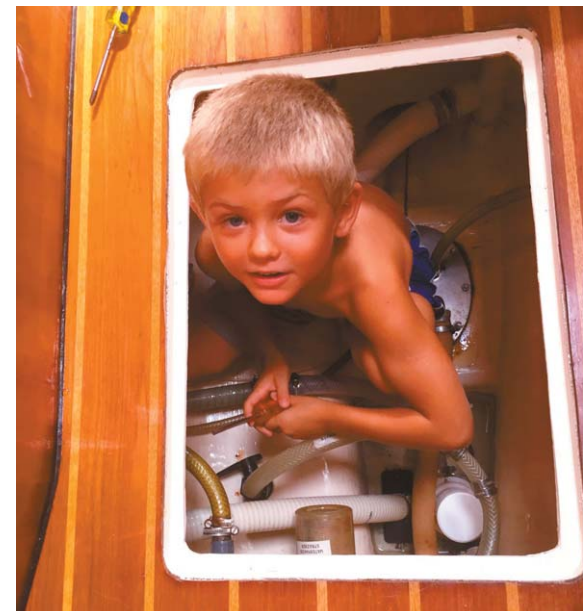


ful that no part of the flag touches the deck. In the evening, they take pride in turning on the anchor light and generally remember without a reminder.
 A job that challenges our older kids is keeping watch for brief periods when we are sailing or passing through reefs. Rick and I are always close by, but we



Left to right: Paul, age nine, measures line on Aphrodite in Egmont Harbour, Grenada; six-year-old twins Karen and Henry cleaning Aphrodite's bilges

"No, Paul already did that," I said. "When?" said Rick, forgetting that Paul, who is nine, ascended the mast with my help to inspect the jib furler track.
 My kids throw tantrums, and sometimes they do not finish their jobs. For some of their tasks we must restate our expectations. And, sometimes our response



Rick taught our older kids to service the heads. Prior to this, impellers were being constantly destroyed by Lego. Now that our kids are responsible for the toilet repairs, we have not had a single impeller incident. They know that they need to plan the job, organize their tools, then oil and put their tools away when they are finished. These are all important lessons in my book.
 Our twins are eager to help, too. Every morning they set out our Canadian flag when we are at anchor, and roll it up to bring it in at night. They know to be care-

want our kids to develop the discipline to keep watch. Gradually they are gaining an appreciation for the importance of keeping watch and they are taking the job more seriously.
 We have limits as to what we will ask of our kids, but not many. In writing this article I asked my husband what would be an example of a hard task that we would consider to be risky and unsafe — a task that we would never ask of our children. "Well, we wouldn't send our kids up to the top of the mast," Rick said.

is flat-out inappropriate, sounding something like, "Because I said so."
 We are seeing first-hand how our boat life, and the challenges it entails, is developing a confidence and self-reliance in our kids. You can see it when they drive the dinghy, or help someone tie into the mangroves for a storm. One day we hope they will recall our adventures, the cultures they've experienced, and the people they've met with compassion and understanding. And, beneath it all, they will know the value of hard work.
 Lorraine, Rick and the four Escher kids plan to cross the Pacific Ocean in early 2018. You can read more about Lorraine and her family at www.aphrodite.cat

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