

## Are You a Bad Dad? ... Or A Good Parent?

By Steve Sherman

At a big regatta a few years ago, I saw a lone sailor come in from the race course on a stormy and blustery day. He had dropped out of the fourth and final race of the day. In the third race, he had capsized three times, having been over his head, both figuratively and literally, in the trying conditions. He was wet. He was cold. He was exhausted. Yet he beamed with pride for having finished that difficult third race.

The sailor's father was waiting on the shore, having spent a lot of money and invested a lot of energy in "his" sailor. Dad proceeded to shake the boy by the shoulders and berate him for being a "quitter".

**Everyone was hurt by it - most of all, the previously proud child, now heartsick at having disappointed his father. It would be a real understatement to say that this dad completely missed the parenting boat.**

I'm far from being a violent person but this scene made me furious. I wanted to intervene. Many others saw this happen and everyone was hurt by it – most of all the, previously proud child, now heartsick at having disappointed his father.

It would be a real understatement to say that this dad completely missed the parenting boat.

This was an extreme case, which should horrify and responsible parent. And yet many parents, without being aware of it, adopt the same philosophy in dealing with their children. Although they may not carry it to the extreme level of this dad, they still manage to overstress the importance of winning. Perhaps they do this unconsciously and inadvertently, but they do it all the same.

The single most important question for parents to confront in their hearts is this: "What lessons do they want their children to learn from sailing?" Do they want their children to fly and leave the nest as an eagle, to soar on their own? Do they want to give their children powerful tools to grow into a confident, productive, and satisfying adulthood? Or do they want to relive their own youth at their children's expense, and collect a few trophies?

Sailing offers our children a treasure trove of life skills, if we stay focused on placing these qualities ahead of winning. Here's a partial list of potential benefits:

- Self confidence and independence
- Social Skills in dealing with all sorts of people
- Winning with dignity but not arrogance
- Losing without feeling beaten
- Honesty and Integrity
- Citizenship and Sportsmanship
- Self-Esteem
- Concentration
- Wholesome Exercise
- Seamanship
- Most Importantly, Friends for life

In the basement of my home are over a hundred trophies. They are worthless to me. They are not what I cherish from my years of sailing. Looking at them reminds me of the famous poem by Shelley, about an elaborate monument to an ancient king, which the centuries have left in ruins.

Nothing besides remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away.

But something much more important than the trophies does remain – the valuable lessons and life-skills which sailing has given me. I need them and use them every day, every hour, to be the best person I can be. Perhaps with time, all parents will seek to give their children these enduring benefits of sailing, and let trophies gather dust and rust away.