

## **Crafting Ships**

*by Mark Hegener*

Nine year old Christopher has been working for nearly four hours on his current project. I am not sure how long ago he designed this ship--has it been a process that is years long or is he winging it right now as he drills holes for the rigging and excavates a recessed area in the hull? Ships have always caught his eye and I don't see a new arising passion soon, so the answer is probably both.

At any rate, up to right now it has been four solid hours with three very short breaks. One while he waited for me to help with a couple of quick but fairly tricky saw cuts, another so I could switch bits in the brace he's using, and once when I moved him aside to sweep the wood shavings back into a pile.

I look at the boat he is building and I envision that it is finished out as a three masted bark trimmed to race the Northern Atlantic. Or possibly it will be a sleek sloop outfitted for trade in the South Pacific. Or maybe a cutter to ply the coast of Northern Europe. More than likely it is a hunk of fir that will float the pond on Little Bonaparte Creek, and end up as a flash of light and warmth in an early spring campfire down by the bridge below our dam.

What was his lesson in all of this drilling and sawing and sanding? Was there a lesson for me as well? Who dare put a value on it? There will be no portfolio material produced with this lesson. The project will probably not even rate precious display case status for very long, because there are always so many of these projects and we have many children doing them.

The lessons learned will be carried with Chris alone. Each lesson proving its worth in its own time, from now throughout his lifetime. His life will test his learning, his desire will hone the experience and help him build on what he set out to do. If, many years from now, he chooses to build a full scale vessel, the lessons learned today will be a part of that project. If he never chooses to build a sailing ship the lessons will be there for those other projects as well.

And at the same time he is not alone in this learning. Everyone contributes with help, encouragement or suggestions, each drawing on and adding to their own vast store of experiences. I know the tools, the process and I too have studied sailing ships. Younger brother Michael prowls the perimeter of the project, quick to grab a discarded piece or test an observation or maybe just try out his ability to work a tool. Big sister Jody, knowing little of ships (horses are her passion), searches through material scraps for just the right pieces to make the sails. Mom advises on the kind of needle and thread needed, and the stitching to fashion the sail. Older brother Jim is studying it with the eye of a research engineer. And of course all will offer enthusiastic appreciation when the ship is ready to launch.

Chris has decided that he will let his ship go in the big lake up the road, and he says that it will look good floating off, and that it will probably end up hooked on a branch on the side of the lake or maybe it will drift down the creek, perhaps into the river and eventually out into the ocean. But that launching will have to wait until it is fully rigged and looking real good for its journey. He will know when.

I look a long way past this small boat and whatever ending awaits it. Chris is willing to push this lesson into the great unknown, and I am comfortable with the knowledge that the lessons will last much longer and be much bigger than this lovingly crafted sailing ship.

Credit:

This article appeared in the March-April, 1991 issue of Home Education Magazine. Mark Hegener, publisher, has five children and three grandchildren. He and his wife Helen make their home in Alaska.

Copyright 1998 Mark Hegener and the National Home Education Network.

Available for free distribution if this notice is included.