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Sailing was one of the few things my dad and I could do together during my rebellious teen-age years. While I was growing up along the Mississippi River, we'd navigate his 16-foot sloop up and down the murky brown channel waters, darting barges. We didn't always talk, but it was out there in the muggy Midwest winds that we best understood each other, sharing a love for speed, adventure, sport and nature. During those trips, he often would talk about his dream to sail beyond the muddy river to clear ocean waters. I always encouraged him as we conjured up the perfect Caribbean sailing adventure.

So last fall, when he invited me to spend a week with him and five of his friends on a 36-foot catamaran in the Florida Keys, I said, "Yes," even though I always get deathly seasick. How could I say no? I had been a part of those conversations, and I knew I was still an important part of Dad's dream.

"Promise you'll bring me something, *anything*, to prevent seasickness," I said. "And I'll bring you sunscreen."

I packed a few essentials, plus the promised sunscreen, and headed for Oceanside Marina on Stock Island in Key West, Fla., completing the last leg (from the bus depot to the marina) on a rental bike. When I rolled in, my dad, 62-going-on-10, greeted me with a bear hug and an excited smile. Getting seasick would be worth it to see him in this happy state, I thought. As if he were reading my thoughts, Dad rummaged through his duffel bag and presented me with a gift. "I got these for you," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

my old man and the sea

A father and daughter team
fulfill a lifelong dream on the
deep blue. By Beth M. Howard

"They're perfect!" I exclaimed, trying on the two anti-nausea Velcro wristbands.

Our original plan had been to be true seagoing adventurers, sailing from one island to another. But after completing the required one-hour briefing by the charter operator from whom we were renting our vessel (a beauty of a catamaran — would you rent someone a \$200,000 boat without making sure the sailors could sail?), we realized our skills were geared toward river and lake sailing, not honed for the vast ocean. Sailing my dad's old 16-foot boat on the Mississippi had been one thing. Sailing a catamaran through coral reefs in the shallow Gulf Stream was quite another, requiring extensive navigational skills, chart-reading capabilities, knowledge of local weather patterns, an understanding of currents and more. We decided instead to take a series of day trips from the harbor, which

escapes

houses a resort with hot showers and an elegant restaurant.

On day one, we headed to nowhere in particular, just to get our bearings and a feel for how the boat handled. Another day, we sailed to the largest living coral reef in North America to snorkel in the greenish-blue tropical waters. I came eyeball to eyeball with a 3-foot-long barracuda — just a baby and more curious than dangerous. But with those rows of jagged teeth, it was reminiscent of a scene from *Jaws*. Another morning, we sailed to where a 40-foot European sailboat had wrecked on a sandbar the night before. It was another harsh reminder of the skill you need to navigate these shallow waters.

One afternoon, when the sails were under control, my dad joined me on the bow, where we sat together taking in the glittering vastness, the wind and spray in our faces.

“Is this what you dreamed of?” I asked him, breaking the silence. Without taking his eyes off the sea, he admitted, “If I had it to do over again, I’d like to know more about navigation and reading the charts. But it was worth the time and money — especially that first morning when you rode into the marina on the rental bike. What about you?”

I was happy we had a chance to spend some time together, too. We had fulfilled a lifelong dream, and I hadn’t even gotten seasick! People say those anti-nausea wristbands work — and maybe they do. But deep down inside, I think it was because my father gave them to me.

Beth M. Howard is a free-lance writer in Santa Monica, Calif.

details:

Southernmost Sailing Inc., P.O. Box 369, Key West, FL 33041; (305) 293-1883. Catamaran rental is \$2,000 to \$2,800 per week (\$125 additional per day to hire a captain).