

## Racing With My Grandpa by Claire Heffernan

In Rock Hall, Maryland, I got a unique experience: to race in a regatta with one of the best skippers I know. Captain Jim has taught me to sail from a very young age, but racing was a completely different experience.

I crewed the first two races, but on the third one, Grandpa said to me "It's time for you to take the helm." I was excited. When I took the helm and started going downwind, I was thrilled to be finally racing. I was going so fast, I could feel the wind in my hair, and Grandpa said I was doing great. Then, I arrived at the mark. Rounding a mark without hitting it or any other boat and while respecting the right of way rules was a lot harder and scarier than I had imagined. "Get a little closer" "be ready to jibe" "not yet. You'll hit the mark" were some of the things Grandpa was saying to me. I was trying to look at the other boats, the wind, my sails, and the mark all at once. Then I heard Grandpa yell "you need to give us room to jibe" and my head swung around. I saw another Wayfarer right next to us which was starting to turn toward us. Had Grandpa not been there, I would've panicked. But fortunately, he knew that I had just enough room to avoid the mark. "Jibe" he told me, and I did. Passing that mark in front of the other Wayfarers was definitely an enjoyable moment. Then, I finished the windward leg and, despite a few wind shifts, finished in first place.

The next day, I was at the helm for a very different race. Grandpa did the start as usual, even though he had wanted me to try a start. I still felt uncomfortable fighting the other boats to get over the line first while not crossing it too early. Just after passing the windward mark, I took over the helm to start what I thought would be a normal downwind race. I was wrong. The wind died just after the mark, and the race soon became snail paced. Thanks to Grandpa, we were able to take advantage of some small gusts and wind shifts (which were common: we were going between a close, broad, and beam reach to keep our heading despite the shifts). The gap between us and our competitors widened as time went on, and we even passed a Windmill, though those boats had started before us.

Right before we rounded the mark, the wind picked up, allowing us to make the turn. As we approached the finish line, I looked back and saw that the other two Wayfarers were neck in neck, with my dad crewing in one and my uncle in the other. I was happy to be a safe distance ahead of them, and passing the finish line in light and shifty wind made me feel far more accomplished than any of the other races.

Throughout both of those races, I definitely benefited from having Grandpa with me. He notices a lot more than me and knows how to interpret what he sees. I learned a lot about sailing and racing at Rock Hall and I hope to have an opportunity to do this again.



*Claire Heffernan and crew, Captain Jim*