

Journey from Youth Sailor to Collegiate Sailing Team

By Molly O'Sullivan

In my earliest memories, I am sailing. I remember the sun and the sea spray on my skin, sitting on my dad's lap as he captained our Catalina through the San Juan islands. We spend a good part of every summer on our sailboat Shenachie, cruising, playing in our dinghy sailboat, swimming, exploring beaches, and crabbing for our dinners. Sailing has always been a part of my life. But what I possessed in enthusiasm and time on boats, I lacked in the technical knowledge required to sail on my own and sail comfortably.

Two summers ago, at the age of 16, I signed up for the one week beginner youth sailing camp with SISO, hoping to gain that formal education I had never received. By the end of the week, my initial nerves and excitement were replaced with newfound confidence and competence.

I loved my sailing camp experience and happily spent the rest of that summer volunteering with the camps. Last summer, I was offered the opportunity to work as an assistant instructor, which was an incredibly fun summer job being on the water with kids. Additionally, it allowed me to refine both my sailing and teaching skills, preparing me for the US Sailing instructor training course I took later that summer with several other young sailing friends I met through SISO. I am incredibly proud to say that I worked this year as a US Sailing certified instructor for SISO/City of Boise, teaching both beginner and intermediate camps!

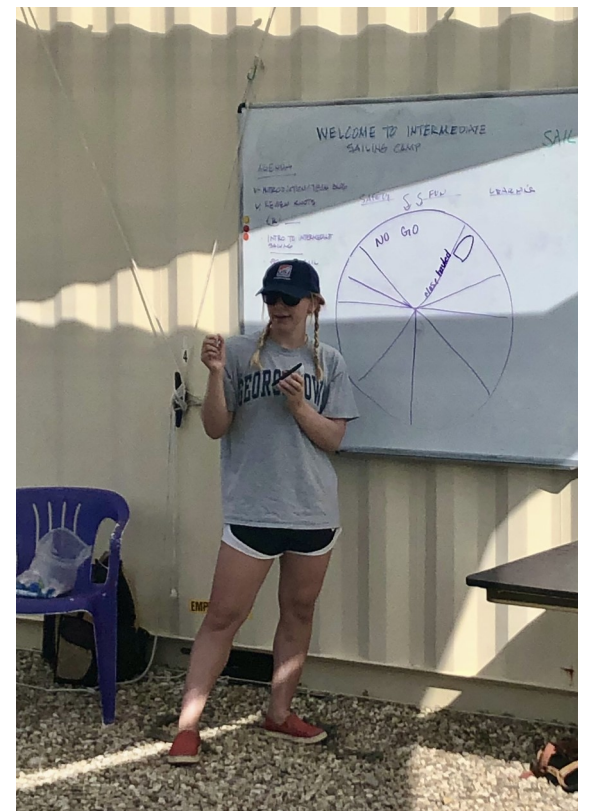
The beauty of SISO's program lies not only in its community outreach but also in its sustainability, with each generation of young campers gaining the opportunity to develop their skills and become an instructor themselves one day. I am proud to be part of this first generation of young SISO campers-turned-instructors and so excited to give back to the program that brought me up.

I certainly never expected to find such a thriving sailing community in landlocked Idaho, yet that is exactly what happened. I learn something new about sailing every week of camp I teach from the incredible and dedicated team of instructors and volunteers. The passionate SISO team is the heart of this program and the reason for its success, growing from just two weeks of camp in its inaugural summer in 2019 to eight weeks of camp in 2023! I've listened to tales of my fellow instructors' ocean passages, their experiences as liveboards, and their racing glory days. Their mentorship has opened my eyes to the world of sailing possibility.

Mid-summer, I captained my own boat for the first time in a regatta at the Cascade Cup and placed first in class! I also raced in the Puget Sound this summer, driven by the confidence SISO instilled in me. This fall, I am a freshman at Florida State University, far from Idaho, and I am seeking out a new home on campus by joining the club racing team. I can't wait to be part of a collegiate program in which I can continue to enjoy being out on the water, practice my skills further, and travel regionally to compete—all possible because of the experiences SISO offered me these past few summers! As I look towards my future in sailing—on the college racing team, teaching back home in the summers, and all of the opportunities beyond—I am both excited about and grateful for the program that got me here. Thank you, SISO!



Molly enjoying teaching at the intermediate sailing camp.



Teaching points of sail at sailing camp.