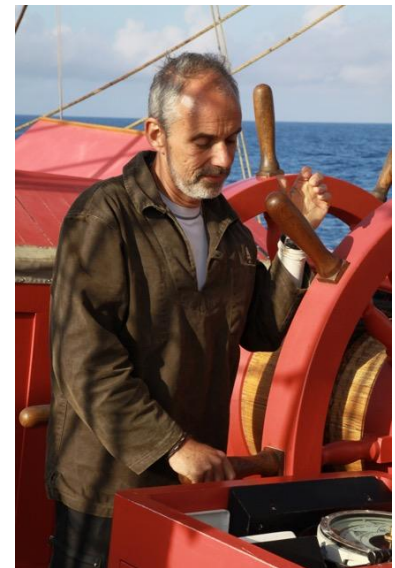




Sensations a'sea
by Marc Jensen ('76)
(Gabier T13, L'Hermione)

It has struck me during this voyage of 3 weeks from Las Palmas in Gran Canaria to the United States that what separates this from life ashore are the sensations. They are often so subtle that we don't account for them in the measure of our temperament, but they play a role...especially for me, as someone new to life aboard a square rigger.

There are the sounds, like the groaning of the ship's wooden skeleton as she roles from port to starboard. Often they take the shape of a staccato that starts slow and climbs increasingly fast to a final clack! Sometimes it is simply a low rumble if the sea is slight. Different structures offer varying pitches that create a concert reminding you, no matter where you are, that we are navigating.



There are smells, too. The obvious ones of the salt air, of course, but also the frying of onions at 01:00 during my night watch. The cook preparing the next day's meal, making us look forward to it all the more. There is a permanent odor of tar from the rigging that is coated in it to prevent rotting. We loose sight of it, but every once in a while, especially when one smells their shirt to determine whether it can be worn one more day without offending someone, we get a good whiff of "batsmorja" (the choice tar of the Swedes that rigged the ship.)

My taste buds will remember this crossing for the importance of a nicely grilled bread that required a great deal of patience with only 2 toasters for 25-50 people (we started with only one and in Gran Canaria I treated the crew, and myself!, to a second—that's how important this sensation is for me). St Michel cookies are ever present during watch, and even though I generally crave them, I no longer do. The food has been inventive and enjoyable. The cooks clearly have the hardest job aboard keeping morale high with diminishing resources as the crossing unfolded.

One's sense of touch is compromised by the use of our hands to haul lines of hemp and manila, to pinch

linen sails to furl them, and maintain the ship on a daily basis, scrapping, sanding, painting, etc. Through our leathered palms everything feels softer, strangely enough. Your fingers, strengthened through unusual use, become difficult to work to do habitually easy things like tying shoelaces and brushing teeth.

There is also the feel one's body takes in. Standing watch on the bowsprit with one's back against the head stay, you can feel the ship "breathe" as the wind and seas strain the rigging fore and aft into the rise and fall of the sea. And, the ever present roll of the deck makes your gate go from an uphill climb to a downhill brake in the span of a few feet.



Since we take in most of our information through sight, it is here that we are treated to the greatest experiences. Watching the foam from the top of the bow wave race, briefly ahead of the ship to be overtaken in a pulsing manner. This same foam comes to life at night with phosphorescent algae. As the aerated sea water drifts past the hull the foam begins to look like a reflection of the milky way that adorns our sky with the glowing algae forming ever new constellations. At any moment I look around in wonder at the majesty of this ship; her sails that billow in concert, her running rigging that drift overhead giving the sails their shape and the standing rigging that remind me that I am not on any ordinary vessel, but a replica of an 18th century frigate.

Sunsets and risings become moments of communal joy often accompanied by guitar, accordion or saxophone. My favorite time is the early morning from sunrise until the ship comes to life around 8AM. I am often joined by others who are in awe of simply being aboard this adventure.

During this second leg, I was coming "home." One of three aboard to be doing so. We talked about how that changed my perspective...made me bitter-sweet. Anxious to hold those I love in my arms again and sad to have this incredible experience come to an end. Memories and the friendships I've made through this adventure will inspire me for a very long time!