

[WALKING THE PLANK]



Jamie White

Photo by Barbara Davidson

Jamie White sailed over 30,000 miles as bosun, mate, or master on square-rigged and traditional vessels, among them the schooner *Californian*, the galleon *Golden Hinde*, the barque *Star of India* and the brig *Pilgrim*. Over more than 30 years, White sailed on dozens of traditional vessels, crossing the equator on tall ships three times, which makes him a member of the very small club of twenty-first century souls who can claim to have seen so much bluewater pass beneath very traditional keels.

What really puts him in a salty league of his own is his role as chief rigger, master rigger or rigging consultant for a who's who of tall ships, including *Glenlee*, *Moshulu*, *Balclutha*, C.A. Thayer, *Falls of Clyde* and *Polly Woodside*. In 2016, he directed the \$3.5 million rigging restoration of *Wavertree*, the largest wrought iron sailing ship in the world, which now serves as the centerpiece of the South Street Seaport Museum in Manhattan.

Along the way, White served as the director of the Texas Seaport Museum and its tall ship, the 1877 wrought iron barque *Elissa*, and also worked on Hollywood movies as a consultant, sailor, or rigger, including the two *Pirates of the Caribbean* films and the 1984 Mel Gibson movie "The Bounty."

First memory of being on a boat:

My dad was in the bikini business with factories in Southern California and Mexico. Once, when I was twelve years old, a customer couldn't pay for a shipment of several thousand bikinis, so my dad accepted a 1960 35-foot Chris-Craft berthed in Marina Del Rey instead. I remember hours scraping varnish. My younger siblings and I must have scraped too hard, for the boat sank at her berth several weeks later.

Last or current boat: I owned a teak Tahiti ketch that I sold in 2010 when I accepted the position of director of the 1877 barque *Elissa* in Galveston.

Favorite boat you've rigged: Barque *Glenlee* – launched 1896 in Port Glasgow, Scotland, and restored in 1998 in Glasgow, Scotland. It was magical working in the rig of

Glenlee and seeing the slips along the river Clyde where *Balclutha*, *Moshulu* and *Falls of Clyde* were launched. The weather was occasionally a wee bit dreary or downright awful, but the whisky never was!

How did you become a square-rig ship rigger:

Generally, that's a two-beer story, but ... my dad manufactured bikinis, around 15,000 a week. As a kid, he paid me half a cent each to tie an overhand knot in the end of the spaghetti straps on bikinis. I like to say that this was my first rigging experience. In my early twenties, I managed one of the bikini factories for a several years, but wasn't all that thrilled by this career. When I mentioned this to my dad, he told me to do what I loved. So, in 1983, I became a sailing instructor, and a year later signed aboard the New Zealand-built HMAV *Bounty* replica (this *Bounty* is not the replica that sank in Hurricane Sandy, but the replica built for the Mel Gibson/Anthony Hopkins movie "The Bounty"). After 30,000 miles and 33 years, I am still rigging and sailing aboard square-riggers.

Why do you love what you do: Sailing and restoring historic and replica ships has given me such a rewarding if unconventional life -- full of the magic of working with shipmates toward a common goal... working for your ship.

Your scariest adventure aboard:

HMAV *Bounty* was rounding Point Conception on the California coast on a passage from Long Beach to Vancouver, Canada, for the 1986 World Expo. It was five bells in the middle watch and pitch dark on a cold night in early March. Suddenly, we were slapped on the port bows by a foaming rogue wave that appeared out of nowhere. I was aloft with a shipmate freshening the nip on the main yard rolling tackle (a block and tackle used to prevent the yard from slewing from side to side since it was attached to the mast with a rope truss and not a metal truss bow). The ship rolled heavily onto her starboard beam ends, almost throwing the two of us off the yard (we did not have rigging harnesses back then ... the rule was "one hand for yourself, one hand for the ship"). It was such a heavy roll that the green side light above

the dead eyes on the shrouds was underwater and I remember thinking the green glow was eerily beautiful. The roll was heavy enough for the main engines to shut down due to loss of oil suction.

Your most memorable experience working or sailing aboard:

Seeing the Southern Cross for the first time from the deck of a square-rigger. Crosby, Stills & Nash were right when they wrote: "When you see the Southern Cross for the first time / You understand now why you came this way."

Longest time you've spent at sea without setting foot on land:

Passage on HMAV *Bounty* from the west coast of the United States to Nuku Hiva, Marquesas, in French Polynesia – twenty-nine days underway. Crossing the Line, I became a Shellback and pierced my ear with a sail needle and have had a gold earring there ever since.

Favorite destination so far:

Making landfall in French Polynesia – you smell the lush fragrance a day before you sight land. The scents of vanilla and Tiaré, a Tahitian gardenia, will stay with me forever.

Favorite nautical book:

Non-fiction would be *The Mirror of the Sea* by Joseph Conrad. As for fiction – well, nothing has ever surpassed Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

Favorite nautical cause you support and why:

I support one for Sail Training: the Los Angeles Maritime Institute and their Topsail Youth programs aboard brigantines *Exy Johnson* and *Irving Johnson*. (lamitopsail.org) And I also support the South Street Seaport Museum and the marvelous job of stewardship being done with *Wavertree* and the other vessels and artifacts under their care (southstreetseaportmuseum.org).

Favorite quote about the sea:

"Of all the living creatures upon land and sea, it is ships alone that cannot be taken in by barren pretences, that will not put up with bad art from their masters." — Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*