

Tony Souza

This is an account of an interesting day in which I made a connection with Alberto Bola who knew some of Gazela's history.

I met Alberto at the pier in Norfolk, VA during Harborfest 2006. He's a naval architect whose home is Aveiro, Portugal. A retrofit of the tugboat Clyde into a private yacht had him working in Norfolk. He had passed by the Gazela crew on the sidewalk outside O'Malley's Pub the evening before. Taking note of their crew shirts he said to himself, 'Gazela? That rings me a bell.' As he told me this I chuckled at his use of Portuguese syntax while speaking very good English. After work on Sunday he headed down to the docks at River Park to check out this "Gazela".

It was the last minutes of the last hour of Open Ship. I was stationed at the gangway on a very quiet pier having just said goodbye to a young couple with small children who were so happy to have found a ship with activities for children. I turned to find a man reading the banner that describes Gazela. 'Gazela Primeiro?' he asked, 'Can it be?' 'Yes, I said, Gazela Primeiro,' in my best Portuguese pronunciation. Then he looked at the dory on deck and said, 'They only make dories like that in one place, my home town, Aveiro, Portugal. So I invited him aboard. He took a closer look at the dory and pronounced it authentic. I remembered seeing Aveiro on the galley stove so I showed it to him. He announced that the company that cast the stove is still in business and added, 'This is giving me goosebumps.' 'My family owned the shipyard that built Gazela and we have the plans in the office.' Likewise he recognized the windlass, the compass and the engine room ladder as being correct to the age of the ship. Joining us Danie Martin pointed out the recent structural changes and Bobby Flemming added the history of Gazela in Philadelphia. By the time we completed our tour of the ship the potluck party organized by the Schooner Virginia's cook was assembling on Gazela's deck. Crew from Kalmar Nyckel, Schooner Virginia, a pirate rigged schooner whose name I forget, and others were loudly celebrating the end of Harborfest duties. I introduced Alberto to Captain Mac who invited Alberto to stay for the party.

Alberto promised to call his father the very next morning to tell him the good news that Gazela was still sailing the seas and was very much in good hands with the Philadelphia Ship Preservation Guild. We exchanged addresses promising to correspond. So far, there's nothing further to the story, no response to emails, nada. I did learn from one of our crew that chatted with Alberto that there was a divorce happening in his life. Perhaps, the pain of that and work pressure has occupied him. So, for now, meeting Alberto is just a pleasant memory of an evening on Gazela.