

## Episode 66: A Sailor's Life

### Summary

Our guest Patrick talks about his life sailing on Lake Geneva, from learning how to sail as a young boy to making a career out of it as an adult.

### Transcript

Nick: Today I'm talking to my friend and my sailing teacher, Patrick, about his hobby of sailing. And, Patrick, you've basically been sailing for your whole life, right?

Patrick: Yes, grew up in Geneva and my father, being a sailor, he had, uhh, he has a boat on the lake, so I started quite young. Umm, first on the little optimists, the little 'square bathtubs' where you see the kids, uhh, going around in the summer, and then quite quickly on the keel<sup>1</sup> boat. So skipping the middle, usually where you evolve from the small optimists to, umm, to the small boats, umm, and not the keel boats. So I went directly out to sailing and, umm, and still doing it, so, umm...

Nick: And did you find that you were ... did you feel like you were forced into it at any point or was it something that you always loved even from a very young age?

Patrick: Something I always loved. Umm, other sports, my parents tried to push me a little bit into it. And this one, I really didn't need any push or anything to enjoy it. Uhh, the season is quite short, it's roughly from May to September, umm, so a good thing for the summer. Of course there's the summer holidays when you're a student, umm, in high school or so. And, uhh, yeah, definitely something I've enjoyed doing all my life and now managed to take a different turn. I don't know if you want to talk about it now or a little bit later?

Nick: Yeah, I think we'll come to it a little bit later. But, umm, I think you told me once that the boat that you still have in Geneva is the same boat that your parents had when you were little. Is that right?

Patrick: Yeah, we got it in 1980 and I was seven years old at the time, so you can figure out how old I am. And, uhh, thirty-something years later, it's, uhh, it's still going. And ... an easy boat, umm, sturdy<sup>2</sup>, not too much maintenance. Uhh, we've left it on the lake every year. Umm, OK, once every three years or so, take it out of

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<sup>1</sup> keel: a stabilising fin on the bottom of a boat

<sup>2</sup> sturdy: strongly built

the water to dry it properly and repaint the bottom. Umm, but, yes, she's, uhh, an old lady.

Nick: So it's almost like, probably, a second home for you almost, to be on this boat so much.

Patrick: It has been a second home a few times, uhh, not on a long-term (basis) but just to escape a little bit, uhh, either the parents or in between apartments.

Nick: OK, so you've actually kind of lived on the boat just for a week or something like this?

Patrick: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nick: OK, umm, and so when you were younger then, and you have to pass a test to get your licence. At what age can you do that? Or at what age did you do that?

Patrick: Uhh, the sailing part, I think you need to be fourteen, if I'm not mistaken<sup>3</sup>. So, a young teenager can already start, uhh, learning for it. There's, uhh, a theoretical test just to know the rules of the way, and then a practical test, which is not too difficult, as long as you know how to handle your boat.

Nick: And obviously in Switzerland, it's a landlocked country, there's no sea. But as you said, we live right near the lake. And so, I mean, Lake Geneva is the largest lake in western Europe, I guess, so it must afford<sup>4</sup> lots of opportunity to sail?

Patrick: It is a big lake. It's a quite difficult lake, uhh, in terms of sailing because it's surrounded by all kinds of mountains, different mountain ranges. Umm, just here in the Geneva area we have those two mountains, uhh, left and right, the Jura and the Salève, and they will generate their different winds. But then you go a little bit further, uhh, where the water gets a little bit, uhh, wider, and above Lausanne you have, OK, still a little bit of the Jura, but right across it, you have the French Alps, which is a completely different, uhh, type of wind - or generates different winds. And that's the special thing about Lake Geneva and the Swiss sailors because the winds are so shifty<sup>5</sup>, you become pretty good at reading the wind and making the adjustments, uhh, to get going. So, yeah, quite a good ... quite a few good sailors, uhh, came from Lake Geneva.

Nick: OK, so it's a good preparation for what you might see, uhh, in the ocean, I guess, in that way.

Patrick: Exactly.

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<sup>3</sup> if I'm not mistaken (phrase): said when you are pretty sure about something but not 100% sure

<sup>4</sup> afford: give, present

<sup>5</sup> shifty: tricky, deceptive

Nick: And so sometimes you do races from one end of the lake to the other, right? And so I guess you have changing conditions as you're going on the same day?

Patrick: During the summer, there's a race every ... or several every weekend, depending on where you live or where your boat is. And there's one big, big, uhh, regatta<sup>6</sup> starting in Geneva. There's only one mark at the other end of the lake in Le Bouveret, and then back. So traditionally there are about five hundred boats who take part. And, average time is somewhere in twenty-four hours, so you start on the Saturday morning and you come back on Sunday morning or during the night if, uhh, there's a lot of wind.

Nick: OK, and you used to work in IT, I think, uhh, you told me once, right?

Patrick: Uhh, as an IT engineer, yep.

Nick: And then you used to take your holidays from your work, you would go and sail boats for people.

Patrick: Correct, yeah. And that was six years ago now, umm, a random email saying that an organisation was looking for skippers<sup>7</sup>, and I had some time off, some summer vacation. It wasn't really a paid job, per se<sup>8</sup>, but at least, uhh, a free vacation. So, I did quite a few weeks, that was in Croatia. And at the end of these weeks, uhh, that's when it clicked in my head, and decided to quite my job and continue sailing.

Nick: Right, and so what you did then was you started this ... or your own, uhh, service teaching sailing, uhh, in Geneva. So was that ... did you get the idea at that time, or that came later?

Patrick: It was about at that time as well. There weren't related. Umm, but I did notice that, uhh, a lot of English-speaking expats in Geneva were staring at the lake and saying, 'I would like to go out there and have fun, enjoy some sailing,' but they didn't have any experience or the local certification to rent, uhh, a boat without a skipper. And that's where I thought, 'Well, there's a niche<sup>9</sup> to do something.' So I was still working at the time and would offer, umm, just outings at the beginning, after work in the evening, between six and eight in the summer. And slowly, a few people, umm, contacted me, wanted to come and they all said, 'Well, how can we advance? How can we learn?' So, OK, there's definitely something to do here, so I put together a little, uhh, series of pages to teach the basics and do introductory classes, umm, in the evenings during the week and in the

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<sup>6</sup> regatta: boat race

<sup>7</sup> skippers: boat captains

<sup>8</sup> per se (from Latin): in and of itself, intrinsically, (not) exactly

<sup>9</sup> niche: a market opportunity, a suitable place or position

afternoons and evenings on the weekend. And slowly it became, uhh, through the different summers, almost a way to make a living, at least for these months.

Nick: No, it was great, because I went out with you many times. And it was, you know, on the one hand it was a lesson and we were learning things about how to sail, but on the other hand, you're just out on the lake. If it's sunny, if it's warm, you know, it's a great time to be out there as well. So it was almost half-lesson, and half paying for an outing, uhh, as well. So I think everybody who I went with, uhh, they all really enjoyed it.

Patrick: I think they did. I had a ... well, you were one of the returning, uhh, students. But all the others, either they didn't return because they left Geneva and that happens quite a bit, or, well, once you progress, you go on to the next thing. And the next thing is either finding friends with boats here on the lake and going for outings, regattas and so on. Or, uhh, go out to sea in the Mediterranean, also for vacation, rent out a boat, a charter<sup>10</sup>, and learn some more. Or, people have realised that it's not their thing and they just give it up.

Nick: Alright, well that's a shame for them, because I guess they're missing out on a lot, but thank you very much.

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<sup>10</sup> charter (noun and verb): the hiring of a boat, plane etc for private or exclusive use

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Patrick begin sailing?
2. According to Patrick, why can Lake Geneva be a difficult place to sail?
3. How did he make a career out of sailing?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. They're a very wealthy family. They often go on holidays to Greece and \_\_\_\_\_ a big yacht.
2. On Saturday we went down to the lake to watch the beginning of the sailboat \_\_\_\_\_. It was great to see all the boats with their sails at the starting line.
3. He's a bit of a \_\_\_\_\_ character. He's always changing his story, so I don't trust him.
4. The festival starts at 6pm, \_\_\_\_\_. I could be wrong, though.
5. Very little sail boats don't have a \_\_\_\_\_. But bigger boats need them to keep them from capsizing (turning upside down in the water).
6. Our house is hundreds of years old but it never needs any repairs despite all the strong winds we have here. It's very \_\_\_\_\_.
7. If we spend the summer at our holiday house, it'll \_\_\_\_\_ us the opportunity to spend time together as a family.
8. They opened a small business a few years ago. It started slowly but they've managed to find their \_\_\_\_\_.
9. I'm going to France next week for work. It's not a holiday, \_\_\_\_\_, but hopefully I'll be able to do fit in some sightseeing.
10. People are often looking for \_\_\_\_\_ to captain a boat that they've chartered, so experienced sailors can get work that way.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you ever been sailing? If so, what was the experience like? If not, would you like to do it?
2. Patrick said he enjoyed sailing more than other sports as a child. Did you play any sports as a child? Which ones?
3. Patrick quit his 'real' job to try to make a living out of sailing. Would you be willing to quit your job to start from scratch doing something you love, or would you prefer the security of a good job even if you don't love it?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. His parents bought a boat when he was seven years old, so he began learning after that.
2. Because the surrounding mountains create different winds.
3. He started offering evening outings on his boat and eventually he quite his job and started offering sailing lessons.

### Exercises

1. charter
2. regatta
3. shifty
4. if I'm not mistaken
5. keel
6. sturdy
7. afford
8. niche
9. per se
10. skippers