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ONLINE EDITION FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 28, 2007

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## Sports

### Sagamore Soundings

By Jaime Van Dyke Doran

#### Seeing the Sea Through Alex Wolff's Lens

I always find it interesting to learn how people get into boating or marine related careers.

Belonging to a yacht club, I am surrounded with so many interesting people from captivating maritime backgrounds.

Usually our stories are told on a boat or over a cocktail at the clubhouse; yet, Alex Wolff, a local photographer, time and again captures my attention by telling a story through his photography.



The Nee Lev Heeling Hard, by Alex Wolff.

Shortly after I started this column I connected that the pictures I took did not always pair well with the articles. Now, I partner with Alex's company Alex Wolff Photography of Jericho when I need a particular photo. The events he captures are conveyed in a way that is not noticeable to the naked eye. For me, the happenings captured in his work are extra special because it captures the unique experience of local people and the beauty of our community's natural environment.

Alex's connection to photographing the excitement experienced during sailboat races began a few years ago when he had the opportunity to crew on the Wednesday night yacht races at Sagamore Yacht Club. Although trying to photograph and sail at the same time was difficult, he initially got some great shots of the boats, the sunsets, and the crews. More recently, he has been spending his time developing his craft by taking photos while helping the race committee.

Although Alex has decided to sacrifice his sailing experience, the sailors have gained so much from his photos. He now takes about

10,000 sailing and other marine related photos a year. Much of Alex's work is regularly shared among the sailboat racing circuit and some of his work is on display at Sagamore Yacht Club. The following interview highlights Alex's background.

How and when did you start taking photos? I received my first camera at the age of 6. It was a Kodak Hawkeye instamatic and I shot mostly family stuff. The big stuff really caught on in college.

Discuss your training. Photography was a required course when I went to school in 1976 for oceanographic technology at the Florida Institute of Technology. The instructor, Bruce Cathcart, had us really learn the basics, which included camera handling, lens selection, physics of light, black and white shooting and developing as well as color printing. That was the very early days. Almost every time I pick up a camera I learn something new. Places I have found helpful include photography clubs like the Flatbush Slide Club in Brooklyn, workshops offered by members of my professional organizations like the Professional Photographers of America and the Professional Photographers of Greater New York. The majority of my training has been self-administered. I constantly shoot, evaluate my photos, read professional articles, and participate in Internet photo knowledge sharing sites. I am very eager to share what I have learned, and that sharing always leads to my learning a different technique or thinking about things in a new way.

How did you begin taking nautical photos? Underwater photography was a required course at school. At some point I became a SCUBA Instructor and that opened doors for me to travel around the world, sometimes living on a boat for two weeks at a time with no habitable land in sight. I have yet to meet someone who was not fond of sunrises and or sunsets. For me, if there is no water, the setting sun has less impact.

What led you to go professional with your craft? Some wise person once said "If you love what you do for a living you will never work a day in your life." Photography has always been that for me, especially capturing beautiful moments that only exist for a split second...Photos bring back memories of the good times [as does] capturing portraits of family members from newborns to great-grandparents. Interestingly, some of my best portraits are of the crew on Wednesday night sailboat races through Sagamore. One of the captains who very recently took ownership of a 16 x 20 painting [photo on canvas] of him at the helm of his boat, told me he received so much joy from looking at that image, that he wanted a second image for his office. I am sure it will hang at his wake and be passed on to his kids. Bringing that kind of joy to someone is immensely fulfilling for me.

Discuss where your work has been on display or might be someday. I had a few shows in my Moments series, hosted at the Modernage Gallery on Vessey Street in downtown Manhattan. I have been the feature photographer on a few photography sites, have had a few images printed in the Explorer and one image, the winner of the Vanderbilt Race [held near Huntington each year], in Windcheck

magazine. Earlier this year, Sagamore Yacht Club added 14 of my images to its permanent collection, and in May, I had a one-person show called Bits and Pieces, hung in the gallery at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Huntington on Brown's Road, next to Coindre Hall. I will have a few pieces hung there intermittently over the next year and will have the Jericho Library in August 2008, shared with a very talented painter friend of mine, William Hawkins.

The interview with Alex Wolff will be continued in next week's edition. Some of his work can be viewed on the following website [www.seawolff.com/photo/](http://www.seawolff.com/photo/). For more information about boating, environmental matters, and other water-related activities throughout the Oyster Bay area you can email the author at [Jaime.VanDyke@gmail.com](mailto:Jaime.VanDyke@gmail.com) or reach her at 946-9464.



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## Sports

### Sagamore Soundings

#### Seeing the Sea Through Alex Wolff's Photos

#### Part Two - (continued from 9-26-07)

By Jaime Van Dyke Doran

In sailboat racing there are times when things happen so fast that the crew does not have time to pause and take in the big picture of what is occurring in the race or to enjoy the beautiful natural surroundings. For several years, Alex Wolff Photography of Jericho has



A Whale Shark feeding on plankton in the Maldives, located in the Indian Ocean.

captured the scenery and the excitement that the 60 or so sailors routinely experience through Sagamore Yacht Club's Wednesday night sailboat races on Oyster Bay Harbor.

The experience that Alex has gained from shooting 10,000-plus photos of sailboat racing every year and the other shots he takes of family functions or corporate events continues to give Alex more insight into cultivating his craft. Perhaps from this interview some of you may be encouraged to use your camera or work with Alex to capture the unique things that we often overlook occurring in our lives and in nature.

Discuss some unique moments taking nautical or nature photos. Perfect light is always a plus but I make do with what is available. The series of photos that resulted in my specializing in nautical-related photography happened right here in Oyster Bay. The weather was a bit rambunctious for sailing and shooting; there were very strong winds and rough seas. I was crew in the pit of Liberty, when we saw one of the spinnaker class boats rocking and dipping spars in the water, very close to the beach. I think one of the boat's owners, Bob Kelly, said "something is about to happen; I will take your

winch, get that camera ready." Just as I got my Olympus C4000 up to my eye, the spinnaker's keel ran aground, the boat pivoted, and the spinnaker tore loose. I captured all of it in a 14 shot stop action sequence. I was hooked. Also, when I was snorkeling in the Maldives (an island nation in the Indian Ocean) I was buzzed by a 25-foot whale shark and six manta rays. Not only did I remember to shoot, but a photo mentor shot me and the whale shark from the other side. Shooting video of sharks in the wild is just a little more exciting, but it is not something I get to do as often as I like.

Have you been critiqued professionally? Do you have any mentors or teachers? The board of directors of the Professional Photographers of Greater New York (PPGNY) critiqued some of my work for my membership admittance. At monthly meetings, the professionals attending submit photos in a print competition that is judged by senior members with specific judging credentials. Prints are judged using 12 criteria, and a score of 80 is required to certify an entry as a merit print. From each class of prints, one is chosen as best in show. A photojournalistic print of mine won merit status and best in show for the portrait category at the September 2007 meeting. Even with all of the self-study and practice I do, I find outside critique and influence important to my development, both technically and creatively. The current PPGNY president, Owen Kassimir, of Owen Photography in Syosset, and several other PPGNY members have provided great insight. Of course, there are many photographers, like Jay Maisel, who influence me.

What type of camera, film, and other equipment do you use? Three years ago I stopped shooting film altogether. At that time I was usually shooting a Canon A-1 with Agfachrome film for color slides and Ilford for black and white. I shot Fujichrome Velvia for most of my underwater work. I now work 100 percent digitally, mostly with a Nikon D2X which has 12 megapixels. My lenses of choice for yacht racing around Oyster Bay are a Nikkor 17-55 F2.8 for close up work at the start and finish of the race when the sailboats are very close. I use a Nikkor 70-200 F 2.8 Vibration Reduction lens for the times I am at a long distance from the fleet or trying to catch the excitement of the crew. Occasionally, I flip on a Q-Flash to light up the boats when the sun is completely down, though I still have to work out how best to do that.

What are the trends taking place in photography? There are now digital cameras that can be programmed to not take a photo if the subject is not smiling! I think the biggest changes we will see in the next few years are that digital manipulation and converting photos to painting like images will be used more. Programs like Photoshop from Adobe and Picasa from Google will help people get more satisfaction out of the time they spend with a camera. There may also be a large wave of disappointment as casual photographers spend more money on equipment, but do not consistently get "professional quality" images. Directed education will be the key to bridging that gap. I have several amateur clients whom I teach advanced techniques about their cameras, photography, and software. I hope to see more of the serious amateurs finding professional mentors to help them get past the early bumps.

What is so unique about taking nautical photos? Being on the water, sun in my face, water speeding under the bow, a gentle roll, all speak of having a great time. Combine that with the changing quality of light on the water and you find every shoot a little different. Where is the sun? How will it reflect on the water? Will it bounce off the sail? Is the water smooth enough for a glass light reflection or so rough the best we can hope for is a color tinge on the waves? With water, light is never the same and the possibilities are endless.

How does one view and/or purchase your work? Much of my work is commissioned. Not only is this true for portraits of newborns, entire families, weddings, etc., but also for people's yachts. The rest of my work is available directly through me. My work can be seen online at various places like [www.seawolff.com/photo/](http://www.seawolff.com/photo/) and [picasaweb.google.com/alexmwolffphotography](http://picasaweb.google.com/alexmwolffphotography). My new website will be live soon at [www.alexmwolffphotography.com](http://www.alexmwolffphotography.com). Over the next several years, I am hoping to have a large collection of images that have a wide appeal as well as a good vehicle for selling them.

For more information about boating, environmental matters, and other water-related activities throughout the Oyster Bay area you can email the author at [Jaime.VanDyke@gmail.com](mailto:Jaime.VanDyke@gmail.com) or reach her at 946-9464.



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