

# My First Boat

by Joe Nattress

I bought my first boat when I was 14 years old.

An 11 foot Sea Snark. I always thought that was a strange name for a sailboat as cool as mine. What the hell is a snark, anyway?

It cost me 88 bucks and two Kool cigarette cartoon end panels. My buddy's dad smoked Kools.

It was basically a styrofoam surfboard with a dip in the middle and a lateen sail. The sail said Kool on it. I operated a free floating advertisement for big tobacco at 14. That's good marketing.

I sailed that boat for hours at a time. I'd go out a little farther into the lake each day, seeing how far I could go and still get back home. I learned a lot.

I learned that when you got out past the big north point in the late afternoon, the waves got big. And that's where the fun began.

The wind was stronger out there. That's when that little boat came alive. Heeled over on it's rail, the sheet taugth around my hand, the small boom just clearing the waves as the hull bounced through the warm water. I went over more than once.

I learned to balance that boat so I could run it all afternoon on its rail in 3 foot waves.

After a while, my little brother started going out with me. He could swim like a fish since he was born, as I remember. In a lifejacket, he was like a bobber.

That was a good thing. Because whenever I looked away from the tiller, he'd swing that thing as fast as he could and over we'd go. He'd pop up spitting water and giggling.

I'd be quickly grabbing him, the sheet, and the rail as I rited the boat. Don't want to loose the little brother - mom and dad would be pissed!

We'd catch wind again and be off.

Before I knew it, he'd shove the tiller hard to wind, and over we'd go again. Damn!

I had to laugh, though. At 15, speed and getting to the other side of the lake mattered to me. At 5, all he wanted to do was dump the boat. So when he was in the boat, that's what we'd do - stay inside the north point, spit water, and laugh.