

**THE AUSTIN FALL**  
**House & Garden Show** >>  
August 23-25  
Austin Convention Center  
[Click here for details](#)

-- Our Partner --

**On Austin360**

- ▶ [Weekly Webfares](#)
- ▶ [ABIA Guide](#)
- ▶ [Find B&Bs, Hotels](#)
- ▶ [Weekly Events E-mail](#)



**A picture is worth a thousand words**

Now you can buy our photos to document your world.

[Click here to view gallery.](#)

**statesman.com**  
Austin American-Statesman

**STATESMAN SHOPPING CENTER**

- ▶ [SelectShopper](#)
- ▶ [Photos for sale](#)
- ▶ [Special order photos](#)
- ▶ [Internet Directory](#)

**SEARCH**

Statesman.com  
SelectShopper  
(Newspaper Ads)  
Search Tips

Site Map **NEW**

**TODAY'S EDITION**

- Home
- 'A' section
- Metro & State
- Sports
- Business
- Life
- Opinion
- Weather

**WEEKLY**

- Dining
- Insight
- Movies
- Travel
- XLent
- Williamson

**A LOOK BACK**

- Last 7 days
- Archives

**MORE**

[Email Newsletters](#)

**COLUMNISTS**

- Michael Barnes
- Michael Corcoran
- Kitty Crider
- Ricardo Gándara
- Jane Greig
- Joe Gross
- Diane Holloway
- Leigh-Ann Jackson



MAX

The Tenacious is wheelchair accessible, allowing it to offer a taste of sailing life to more people, including Austinite Gene Rodgers.

**[A dream fulfilled aboard a tall ship](#)**

In a wheelchair, Gene Rodgers rode the seas around the Canary Islands.

**[Will 'evil' creature lure visitors to museum?](#)**

Baltimore attraction displays three snakeheads, the infamous 'walking fish'.

**[Stars and Stripes forever in Missouri](#)**

140 years ago the 'Soldier's Newspaper' began here; museum now honors its legacy.

**[Denmark city is right out of a fairy tale](#)**

Hans Christian Andersen fans visit Odense mainly because it is the writer's hometown.

[Back to top](#)

**CARIBBEAN MEMORIES**

On Aug. 25, the Travel section will focus on the Caribbean. If you've been there lately, we want to know what made your trip memorable. Keep it short (no more than 150 words) and include your name and daytime phone number. E-mail your story and photo to [travel@statesman.com](mailto:travel@statesman.com). Deadline is Tuesday, Aug. 20. If we choose your story, we'll feature it in our special section or online.

**DESTINATION TEXAS**



Traverse Texas online. Click the various regions of the Texas map for special Travel sections on those areas.

**SPECIAL SECTIONS**

- **JULY:** [Hawaii](#)
- **JUNE:** [Canada](#)
- **APRIL:** [Mexico](#)
- **MARCH:** [Europe](#)
- **FEBRUARY:** [Ski stories](#) and [Florida](#)
- **JANUARY:** [Cruise memories](#)
- **DECEMBER, '01:** [Eco-tourism](#)
- **NOVEMBER, '01:** [Ski destinations](#)
- **OCTOBER, '01:** [Caribbean](#)
- **SEPTEMBER, '01:** [Hawaii](#)
- **AUGUST, '01:** [Bed and](#)

**SPECIAL REPORTS**

- Jacqui and Amadeo
- Waiting to Exhale
- The Ransom Center
- The Road Home
- 'Out' in Austin

**AP WIRES**

- National news
- World news
- Sports news
- Financial news
- Entertainment news

[Breakfasts](#)

- **JULY, '01:** [Texas beaches](#)
- **JUNE, '01:** [Gambling destinations](#)

**AP WIRE**

Entertainment stories from the Associated Press.

- [Paul Simon Steps in for McCartney](#)
- [Film Examines New Republic Writer](#)
- [Russians Give Singer Payment Deadline](#)
- [Glass Art Piece in Chicago Smashed](#)
- [Book, TV Movie Show Inside of Enron](#)
- [Matthew Perry Craves Fame](#)
- [The Rolling Stones Play Surprise Show](#)
- [Review: 'Boys From Syracuse' Fizzles](#)
- ['XXX' Tops Box Office for 2nd Week](#)
- [Psychiatrist to Advise NBC on 9-11](#)
- [Niccol's New Movie Explores Truth](#)
- [The Rolling Stones Play Surprise Tour](#)
- [Enron Insider Book, TV Movie Deal](#)
- ['XXX' Wins Box Office; 'Crush' 3rd](#)
- [Anti-Nuke Film Battles Film Board](#)
- ▶ [More AP entertainment headlines](#)

**CLASSIFIEDS**

- StatesmanJobs
- StatesmanCars
- Real Estate Sales
- Real Estate Rentals
- Merchandise
- Pets & Livestock
- Services
- Business/ Education
- Public Notices
- Obituaries
- Celebrations
- Place an Ad

[Advertise with the Statesman](#) | [Subscribe to the Newspaper](#) | [Make us your Homepage](#)

Presented by [The Austin American-Statesman](#). [Contact us](#).

Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). By using this site, you accept the terms of our [Visitor Agreement](#).

© [Copyright Cox Interactive Media, Inc.2001](#) All rights reserved.



Statesman ads are now online!

[Click Here Now!](#)

SelectShopper  
statesman.com

Central Texas Golf Course Communities

-- Our Partner --

360 Events

- [Weekly Webfares](#)
- [ABIA Guide](#)
- [Find B&Bs, Hotels](#)
- [Weekly Events E-mail](#)

**STATESMAN SHOPPING CENTER**

- [SelectShopper](#)
- [Photos for sale](#)
- [Special order photos](#)
- [Internet Directory](#)

**SEARCH**

Statesman.com  
SelectShopper  
(Newspaper Ads)

[Site Map](#) **NEW**

**TODAY'S EDITION**

- [Home](#)
- ['A' section](#)
- [Metro & State](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Life](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Weather](#)

**WEEKLY**

- [Dining](#)
- [Insight](#)
- [Movies](#)
- [Travel](#)

[XLent](#)

[Williamson](#)

**A LOOK BACK**

- [Last 7 days](#)
- [Archives](#)

**MORE**

[Email Newsletters](#)

**COLUMNISTS**

- [Michael Barnes](#)
- [Michael Corcoran](#)
- [Kitty Crider](#)
- [Ricardo Gándara](#)
- [Jane Greig](#)
- [Joe Gross](#)
- [Diane Holloway](#)
- [Leigh-Ann Jackson](#)

**SPECIAL REPORTS**

## A dream fulfilled aboard a tall ship

### For two weeks, Gene Rodgers rode the seas around the Canary Islands

By Gene Rodgers  
SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN  
Sunday, August 18, 2002

"All hands prepare to brace yards. At the foremast, brace yards hard a-port. Let go and haul."

That's the order given by Captain John Fisher, of the square-rigger Tenacious. Often referred to as a tall ship, the top of her tallest mast towers 124 feet above the deck. The masts have to be tall to support 21 sails. The Tenacious is one of only two tall ships in the world built to be wheelchair accessible. In fact, it was designed, built and crewed by people both with and without disabilities.

It's about 5,000 miles from my home in Austin to my destination —the Tenacious, which was docked in Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the Canary Islands.

I visited many ports during my time on the Tenacious. But, to be honest, I don't remember many of them because my fascination was with life on the open sea. I have been drawn to the sea since I was a teenager. I admire the fierce independence and self-sufficiency of sailors.

When I was 16, I was a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. I had a rowboat then —and much bigger plans for the future. Unfortunately, shortly after I turned 17, I broke my neck while cliff climbing. Paralysis was instant. My plans for sailing were dashed upon the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GENE RODGERS/p>

Gene Rodgers was able to see the ocean through the eyes of a sailor.



/p>

Rodgers, right, visits with a shipmate on deck.



**A picture is worth a thousand words**

Now you can buy our photos to document your world.

[Click here to view gallery.](#)

statesman.com  
Austin American-Statesman

[Jacqui and Amadeo](#)[Waiting to Exhale](#)[The Ransom Center](#)[The Road Home](#)['Out' in Austin](#)**AP WIRES**[National news](#)[World news](#)[Sports news](#)[Financial news](#)[Entertainment news](#)

rocks, like so many other dreams for so many years —until nearly 29 years later, when I was able to fulfill my dream of being a sailor —even if only temporarily —aboard the *Tenacious*. During my two-week sailing trip around the Canary Islands, I learned that sailors lead a life of contradiction. They are drawn to the sea by its promise of uncertainty, provided by its vastness, depth and ever-changing winds and waves. There is a sense of freedom associated with such a wilderness, wet and wild. Yet, at the same time, sailors' lives are quite regimented. Days are divided into four-hour blocks of time, with a bell sounded every half hour to let them know the time.

When passengers first came aboard the *Tenacious*, we were each assigned to a watch. I was assigned to aft starboard (the rear, right side of the ship). Duties were simple enough —while we were at sea, I was to watch for other ships, debris floating in the water, fire and even pirates. I recalled that world-renowned sailor Peter Blake was killed by pirates in Brazil in December. This Americas Cup winner was doing environmental studies on the Amazon when he was attacked by pirates.

My five watch-mates were very friendly, and most were experienced sailors. Most watches were uneventful and gave me an opportunity to learn more about sailing from Colin, our watch leader. I loathed the middle watch (12 a.m. to 4 a.m.) and the morning watch (4 a.m. to 8 a.m.), when the weather was particularly cold. I have a spinal cord injury, and my body is very poor at regulating temperature. It only takes a few minutes for me to get very cold, and it takes me hours to defrost.

Traditionally, the day starts at noon with the entering of the day, date, and observation on the log board. The bell is struck eight times. This calls the crew to dinner. Ringing the bell helps keep the sailors on track. It clues them when to go to dinner, when to go on watch duty, and when to go on cleaning or work duty.

### One stormy day

As we sailed through the Canary Islands, the weather didn't always cooperate. Though sailing vessels can usually make use of the wind regardless which way it is blowing, it occasionally caused us to rethink our course. Sometimes it changed our daily routine.

Every morning, we got a wake-up announcement at 6 bells (7 a.m.). One morning, it was announced, "Wheelies and wobblies (people who use wheelchairs and people with other mobility impairments) are advised to stay in their berths." Shortly afterward, all of us in the voyage crew quarters heard things crashing onto the floor. We were in the middle of a storm.

The ship was being tossed about like a cork in a washing machine. Everything that wasn't tied down was tossed around. I asked Laurence, in the berth above me, to pull my lee sheet up. This sheet attaches to the bottom of my bunk, and when pulled up and attached to the bunk above me, keeps me from falling out of bed.

Later in the afternoon, when the winds subsided, I went up on deck. It was like trying to walk in a fun house at an amusement park. Imagine trying to push a wheelchair on a moving deck while the ship rolled left then right, pitched forward and back, up and down. As I rolled across the deck, I imagined what would happen if the person pushing me lost control of my wheelchair. I could go flying across the deck and be catapulted over the rail into the great abyss below.

### A magnificent view

Eating on a moving ship presented a unique challenge. While the ship is moving forward, it also rolls from side to side. Its movements in three-dimensional space are characterized as pitch, yawl, and roll. Normally, this would be a big problem for me as I have no trunk balance and am paralyzed from the shoulders down. However, I adopted a compensatory policy, I wouldn't eat anything that I would be ashamed to wear. I sat at a table facing port and secured my chair to the floor with several safety straps. As the ship rolled to port, I extended my arm and strategically placed my fork, secured in my hand by a Velcro strap, over a target such as a meatball. As the ship completed the roll, I stabbed the meatball. As the ship rolled to starboard, I aimed the fork for my mouth. I learned to get in rhythm with the waves. I was successful and got food into my mouth more often than not.

**CLASSIFIEDS**[StatesmanJobs](#)[StatesmanCars](#)[Real Estate Sales](#)[Real Estate Rentals](#)[Merchandise](#)[Pets & Livestock](#)[Services](#)[Business/ Education](#)[Public Notices](#)[Obituaries](#)[Celebrations](#)[Place an Ad](#)

Mid-morning and late afternoon, we were treated to "smoko", the British merchant marine equivalent of a coffee break. The ship's cook, Fred, and his assistant, Ann, brought freshly cooked desserts and pastries as well as coffee, tea and juices on deck.

Once, I saw Ann up in the rigging, about 50 feet above the deck. I wondered how she got roped into such duty. It turns out she had been on a previous voyage and was asked to come back as a cook's assistant. When the trip was over, Ann would return to the United Kingdom to work as an opera director.

While docked in one harbor, those of us who were willing were sent aloft. As I was hoisted high up the mast, I got a bird's-eye view of the ship and surrounding ocean. I tried to imagine what it was like for sailors 100 years ago. They had to work high in the rigging in all types of weather. They didn't use safety straps back then as we do now. Many sailors were killed or severely injured when they fell from the rigging to the deck. Some even fell into the ocean. Only the lucky were rescued.

Once at sea, the winds were very calm so we went aloft again. It was an incredible view to behold.

We could see for miles in every direction. From high up in the mast the problems of the world seemed insignificant.

### **A fearless captain**

Our captain, John Fisher, was a man's man —competent in his trade. He seemed fearless. At times, he would walk the lines hung from the masts' yardarms. These cross-beams support the big, square sails, hence the name square-rigger. Watching the captain walk the yardarms was like watching a tightrope walker, only a tightrope walker never has to contend with changing winds and a rocking ship. It took a year to convince him to wear a safety harness. Though he wears one now, he never attaches it when he works up in the rigging. Our captain had an intimate knowledge of the Tenacious. When we came into harbor, he knew exactly how he wanted her moored. He wasn't the type to be bullied by harbor officials. Yet he was also a very patient man. He taught me how to use the sextant for navigation. I am no Albert Einstein, nor am I the dullest knife in the drawer. Yet, learning to use this centuries-old nautical device to determine latitude by gauging the sun and stars was no easy feat. Sometimes we would just sit and talk about various explorers and navigators.

I was sorry to say good-bye to the Tenacious and all the great people who sailed her. I'll never forget them, and certainly won't forget the gracious people of the Canaries. But someday I will be back. As Author John Masefield wrote, "I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and sky. And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by."

On the Web For more information on taking a similar cruise check out [www.jst.org.uk](http://www.jst.org.uk)

---

[Back to top](#)

[Advertise with the Statesman](#) | [Subscribe to the Newspaper](#) | [Make us your Homepage](#)

Presented by [The Austin American-Statesman](#). [Contact us](#).

Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). By using this site, you accept the terms of our [Visitor Agreement](#).

© [Copyright Cox Interactive Media, Inc.2001](#) All rights reserved.