

Parents of Rescued Teenage Sailor Abby Sunderland Accused of Risking Her Life

Sailing experts condemn family for allowing 16-year-old American girl to attempt a solo round-the-world voyage

Paul Harris, New York
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A teenage girl attempting to sail solo around the world was rescued yesterday in a remote spot of the Indian Ocean, bringing to a successful conclusion the dramatic bid to save her life.

Sixteen-year-old American Abby Sunderland was picked up from her stricken vessel by a dinghy¹ launched from the French fishing boat *Ile de la Reunion*.²

Her father, Laurence Sunderland, speaking to reporters outside their California home, said his daughter was safe and well: “She got out of her vessel with the clothes on her back, and we are just really excited and ecstatic that Abigail is in safe hands. She was in good spirits . . . she talked to her mother.”

However, the same cannot be said of Sunderland’s yacht, *Wild Eyes*. The vessel was apparently pounded by gigantic waves that had destroyed its mast,³ which in turn knocked out her satellite communications equipment. The yacht was then effectively left floundering midway between Africa and Australia. It is likely to be allowed to sink.

Sunderland had activated an emergency beacon⁴ which started a huge search and rescue operation involving Australia, America, and France. Numerous ships became involved in the hunt, as well as a chartered jet which spotted the teenager late on Thursday. Sunderland was able to radio the plane and report that she was fit and had food and water supplies.

¹ **dinghy**: a small open boat carried as a lifeboat on a larger boat.

² ***Ile de la Reunion***: the French fishing boat carrying the dinghy that picked up Abby is a large ocean-going ship, 180 feet long, 23 feet wide, and weighing 1295 tons.

³ **mast**: the tall, vertical pole that supports the sail and rigging of a ship.

⁴ **beacon**: a radio or transmitter that emits a guidance signal.

The rescue itself was not without incident as rough seas saw the captain of the French boat fall into the water. “He was fished out in difficult conditions,” said a statement from the French territory of Reunion Island.

30 Though the search for Sunderland ended happily, it has caused a debate on the wisdom of such young sailors making dramatic and dangerous journeys. Sunderland was following the achievement of her brother, Zac, who had made the solo journey around the world at the age of 17, becoming the youngest person in the world to do so.



Abby Sunderland on her sailboat *Wild Eyes* in Ensenada, Mexico, during her attempt at a solo round-the-world voyage

Many critics of Sunderland—and her parents—have criticized the decision to let her go on such a journey. “It’s not something that a 16-year-old should be able to decide—whether they’re capable of doing it. It’s potentially
40 irresponsible for the parents,” Michael Kalin, junior director of San Francisco’s St Francis Yacht Club, told the Associated Press.

Other top figures from the world of sailing joined in the criticism. “In Abby’s case she was lucky. It’s only a matter of time until we end up with a tragedy on our hands,” said Derrick Fries, a world sailing champion and author of *Learn to Sail*.

Such opinions by professionals have been echoed on blogs and comments on news articles as members of the public
50 have called the Sunderlands irresponsible and careless. One commentator on the *Los Angeles Times* website summed up the view of many: “Abby Sunderland was on the wrong type of boat (a racing yacht) in the wrong location (the southern Indian Ocean) at the wrong time of year (winter in the southern hemisphere). Other than those minor details, it was a well-planned voyage.”

But the family have robustly defended themselves. They have pointed out that Abby is a highly experienced and highly skilled sailor. They have even used the debate to criticize the
60 too-careful tendency of much modern parenting advice and said that a certain amount of risky challenge was healthy for an adventurous child.

“I never questioned my decision in letting her go. In this day and age we get overprotective with our children,” Laurence Sunderland said. “Look at how many teenagers die in cars every year. Should we let teenagers drive cars? I think it’d be silly if we didn’t.”



Analyze Structure

In a **news report**, whether it's online, in print, or broadcast on television, journalists commonly use the **5 Ws and H questions**—*who, what, when, where, why, and how*—as an outline for writing the news story. Following this structure helps to ensure that writers have covered the necessary details. In turn, readers can use the 5 *Ws* and *H* questions to determine the main idea and supporting details of a news story. The **central idea** is the most important idea about a topic that a writer conveys, and the **supporting details** are the examples, facts, statistics, and anecdotes that provide a basis for the central idea.

Analyzing the Media

Cite Text Evidence

Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- Summarize** Review the news story and fill out a chart like this one to record the story's 5 *Ws* and *H*.

5 Ws and H Questions	
Who is the story about?	
What happened to this person?	
When did it happen?	
Where did it happen?	
Why did it happen?	
How did it happen?	

- Infer** What is the central idea of this article? Cite details from the article to support your answer.