

A “figure 8” voyage for Voyce

By Stephan Bosman

The junior members of the Mercury Bay Boating Club enjoyed an unforgettable evening last Saturday when they gathered for a BBQ and listened to the adventures of Elana Connor, a remarkable blue water sailor from San Francisco.

Elana, who was a foster child, started sailing six years ago. “I left foster care when I was 18-years-old and I was confused,” Elana said. “I wanted to become a writer, but ended up going to university and landed myself a job at a desk, behind a computer. That’s not what I wanted to do with my life. Deciding to change things around and live a life with purpose, is what got me into sailing.”

Three years ago, Elana embarked on her first blue water voyage when she and her dog, Zia, sailed from San Francisco to Hawaii. “I managed to get hold of a yacht and remember my first night on the way to Hawaii was the first time I’ve ever spent a night at sea,” she said. “The journey took 26 days and I was well and truly hooked. I just knew I had to circumnavigate the globe. After some time in Hawaii, I sailed back to San Francisco where I got my boat ready for a trip around the world and in May last year, I set off for the Marquesas Islands. The journey to French Polynesia and from there on to New Zealand was an amazing experience.

“I arrived in New Zealand in December last year. The plan was to leave again by May this year, but then the coronavirus pandemic struck and I couldn’t leave. Realising that I most probably won’t be able to leave for another few months, I decided to circumnavigate New Zealand in a “figure 8,” sailing through Cook Strait twice. I also decided to use the voyage as an opportunity raise awareness and funds for children in foster care, a cause that’s very close to my heart.”

After doing some research, Elana got in touch with Voyce Whakorongo Mai, a New Zealand charity advocating for the more than 6,000 New Zealanders in the state care system. “Voyce is an amazing organisation,” Elana said. “They attempt to positively influence individual care and effect change in the wider care system. They also connect communities and offer experiences that build positive morale among young Kiwis in foster care.”

In conjunction with Voyce, Elana agreed with the Spirit of New Zealand Trust that the funds raised during her New Zealand voyage will be used to pay for some of the children in the state care system to enjoy a 10-day experience aboard the trust’s tall ship, the Spirit of New Zealand.”

“Being a foster child should not hold anyone back,” Elana said. “They have the freedom to follow their dreams and aspirations like everyone else, and if an experience aboard the Spirit of New Zealand unlocks a passion for sailing in some of them, it will all be worth it.”

Elana departed Auckland on her circumnavigation of New Zealand on Wednesday last week. Her first stop was at Great Mercury Island, where island owner, Sir Michael Fay, put her in touch with Jonathan Kline, commodore of the Mercury Bay Boating Club. Jonathan arranged for



Elana Connor with her dog, Zia, in Whitianga last Sunday.

Elana to berth in Whitianga last weekend and couldn’t resist organising an opportunity for her to talk to the club’s youth sailors.

“Saturday evening was great,” Elana said. “The children were so engaged. They especially loved a tour of my boat. They couldn’t believe that I do everything myself, even maintaining and fixing the boat engine.”

Elana departed Whitianga on Monday this

week. She anticipates that her “figure 8” around New Zealand will take approximately four months. She will touch base with boating and yacht clubs for speaking opportunities as she goes along.

To donate to Elana’s cause, visit givealittle.co.nz and search for “Voyage for Voyce.” To stay up to date with Elana’s adventures, visit peregrinasails.com or follow “Peregrina Sails” on social media.