

BUILD

All Wood is hard at work building boats, friendships, and a bright future for himself.

ING A FUTURE

Ali Wood could hardly read. But becoming a good carpenter gave him the confidence to learn anything.

by Christy Damio

Ali Wood, 17, has learned to build boats. He's on the way to becoming a carpenter. His future looks bright. But Ali wasn't always so happy. School was hard for him. Until he was 15, Ali could hardly read.

KEEPING A SECRET

Ali didn't want people to know he was having trouble learning to read. "When I was younger and my teachers told me to read things, I used to get around it," says Ali. "There were 32 students in the room, and I'd sit in the back. They'd go around the room, and by the time they got to me, all I'd have to do was answer a problem."

If the reading started at the back of the room, Ali was ready. "I'd make excuses to move," he says. "I'd be like, 'It's too hot here. I'm moving.'"

But ignoring the problem didn't make it go away. Ali had trouble filling out job

applications. And other students teased him when he was forced to read out loud. "I just beat people up," Ali says. "I was a bully. I knew I was **disabled**, so if anybody laughed at me, I beat them up."

FINDING A GREAT PLACE

Ali wasn't happy in school. But when he was 12, he found a class he loved. His older brother went to an after-school program called Rocking the Boat, just down the block from their home in the Bronx, New York. Ali went with him.

Students at Rocking the Boat learn how to build boats. They cut down trees in New York State's Hudson Valley. Then they cut and bend the wood, put the pieces together, and paint the boats. The program usually doesn't take students under age 14, but Ali really wanted to stay. Adam Green, the director, found things for Ali to do.

"They let me sand," remembers Ali. "That's how I became good at sanding. Then Adam **gradually** let me use tools."

Ali made friends at Rocking the Boat. He discovered that he was a good carpenter. Soon he became an **apprentice** and was paid to help teach other students. Ali loved Rocking the Boat. He was especially glad that he was almost never asked to read anything.

FOUND OUT

Then one day, Adam asked Ali to read the shop rules aloud to the other students. "I couldn't do it," says Ali.

That day, Ali realized how much he was missing by **avoiding** learning to read well. He started going to a tutor.

With tutoring, Ali's reading improved quickly. He and the tutor were the only ones in the room, and Ali never felt distracted or embarrassed. He

WORD WORKOUT

ap•pli•ca•tions: forms you fill out to ask for things | dis•a•bled: in need of help
grad•u•al•ly: slowly | ap•pren•tice: assistant | a•void•ing: staying away from



LEFT: Melissa Cruz and Meliza Peña enjoy working with Ali and building boats. **ABOVE:** Adam Green (left) shows Ali and Melissa how to use tools.



got better every week. After awhile, he wasn't embarrassed to read in class.

Ali's new confidence led to greater **accomplishments**. He became an on-water apprentice, showing students how to **launch**, row, and care for finished boats. His leadership skills helped the program, and the program helped him decide what he wanted to do with his life.

LOOKING AHEAD

Ali has found his talent. "I love working with my hands, and I'm so good at it now," he

says proudly. "I want to be a carpenter."

Rocking the Boat students learn the skills needed to build many things, not just boats. Ali now has many of the skills he needs to build tables, cabinets, and even a house.

Ali still has a hard road ahead of him. He missed a lot in school before his reading improved, and he has a lot of credits to make up. But he's doing better than ever, and that feels good.

"Rocking the Boat feels like a family to me," says Ali. "I like the people here. We stick together. We learn from each other. It taught me to be a better carpenter." Last month, Rocking the Boat finished an 18-foot flat-bottom **skiff**. Ali helped to test the boat in the Bronx River.

Ali knows where he's going. He's built boats, friendships, and his reading skills. Now he's building a future. ■

WORD WORKOUT

ac • com • plish • ments: completed goals | launch: start | skiff: lightweight rowboat

SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW

Answer these questions about "Building a Future." Fill in the bubble next to the best answer to each question.

1. What happened first in the story?

- (A) Ali went to Rocking the Boat.
- (B) Ali learned to sand.
- (C) Ali decided to go to a tutor.
- (D) Ali wrote a book about boats.

2. Why did Ali beat other students up?

- (A) He wanted their money.
- (B) He was practicing to be a boxer.
- (C) They made fun of his reading problem.
- (D) They made fun of Rocking the Boat.

3. What's the name of the director of Rocking the Boat?

- (A) Ali Wood
- (B) Adam Green
- (C) John Smith
- (D) Gary Soto

4. How old was Ali when he first came to Rocking the Boat?

- (A) 8
- (B) 10
- (C) 12
- (D) 14

5. Where is Rocking the Boat located?

- (A) San Francisco, California
- (B) Atlanta, Georgia
- (C) St. Paul, Minnesota
- (D) The Bronx, New York

6. Which of these statements is a fact?

- (A) Ali is 17 years old.
- (B) Ali is going to be famous.
- (C) Building boats is more fun than going to school.
- (D) Reading is very hard.

7. Which of these statements is an opinion?

- (A) Ali first went to Rocking the Boat with his brother.
- (B) Students at Rocking the Boat cut down trees.
- (C) Rowing a boat is boring.
- (D) Ali helped to build an 18-foot skiff.

8. Which of these things did not happen in Ali's story?

- (A) Ali got better at reading.
- (B) Ali joined the Navy.
- (C) Ali became an on-water apprentice.
- (D) Ali decided he wanted to be a carpenter.

9. Which of these sentences did Ali say?

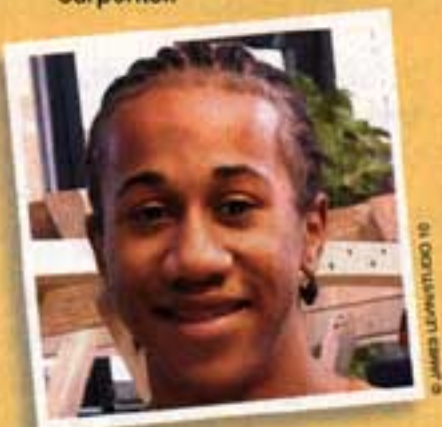
- (A) "I love to read."
- (B) "I love to swim."
- (C) "I want to be a plumber."
- (D) "I want to be a carpenter."

10. What's the main idea of Ali's story?

- (A) You have to read, even if you hate it.
- (B) It's important to find something you're great at. Then you'll get better at other things, too.
- (C) High school doesn't matter, as long as you can find a job.
- (D) If we all had boats, we wouldn't need cars.

THINK ABOUT IT

What's your dream career?
What can you do now to get ready for it?



Ali Wood