

## SEAMANSHIP



### Coming Alongside a Container Ship on the High Seas

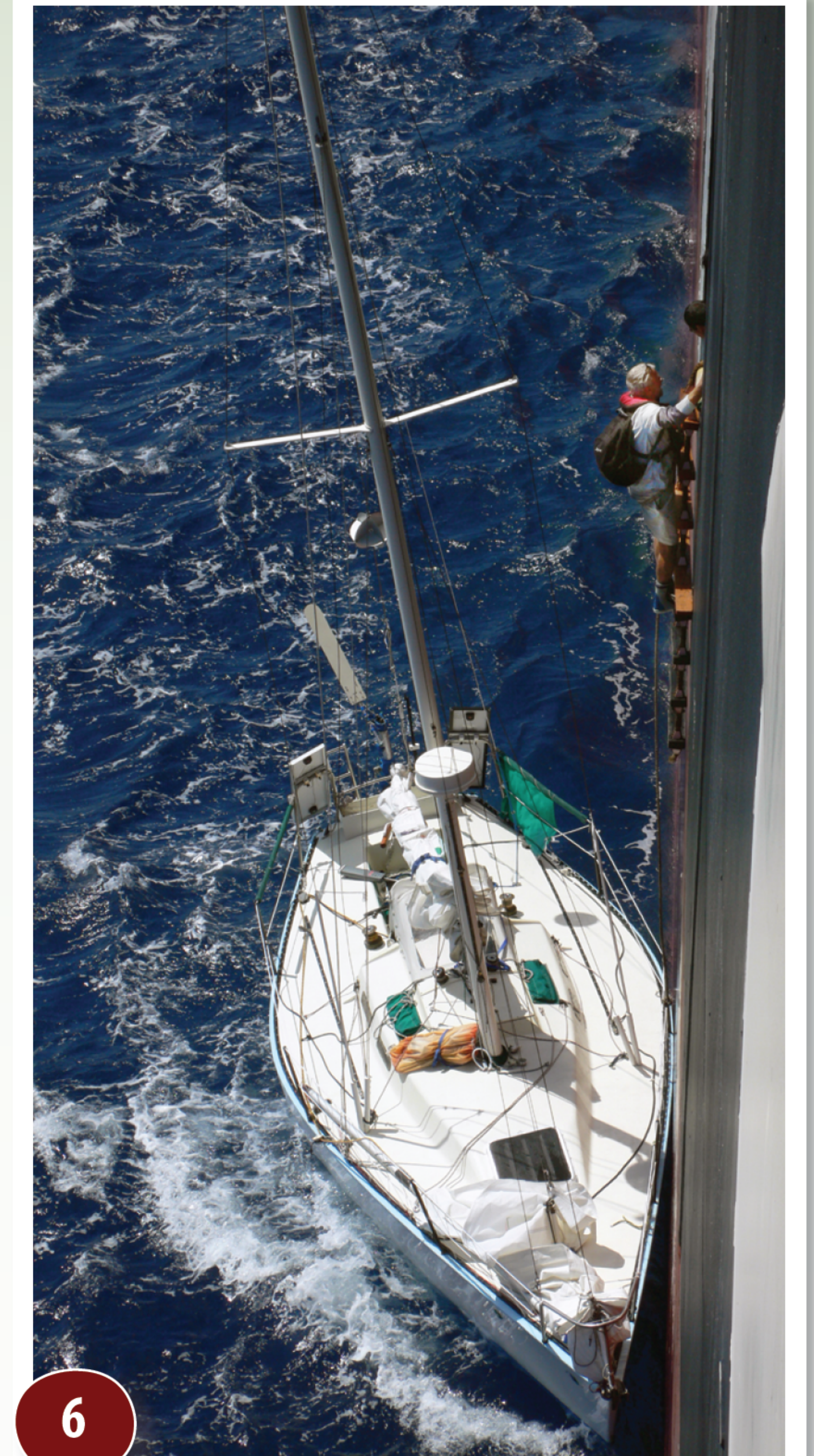
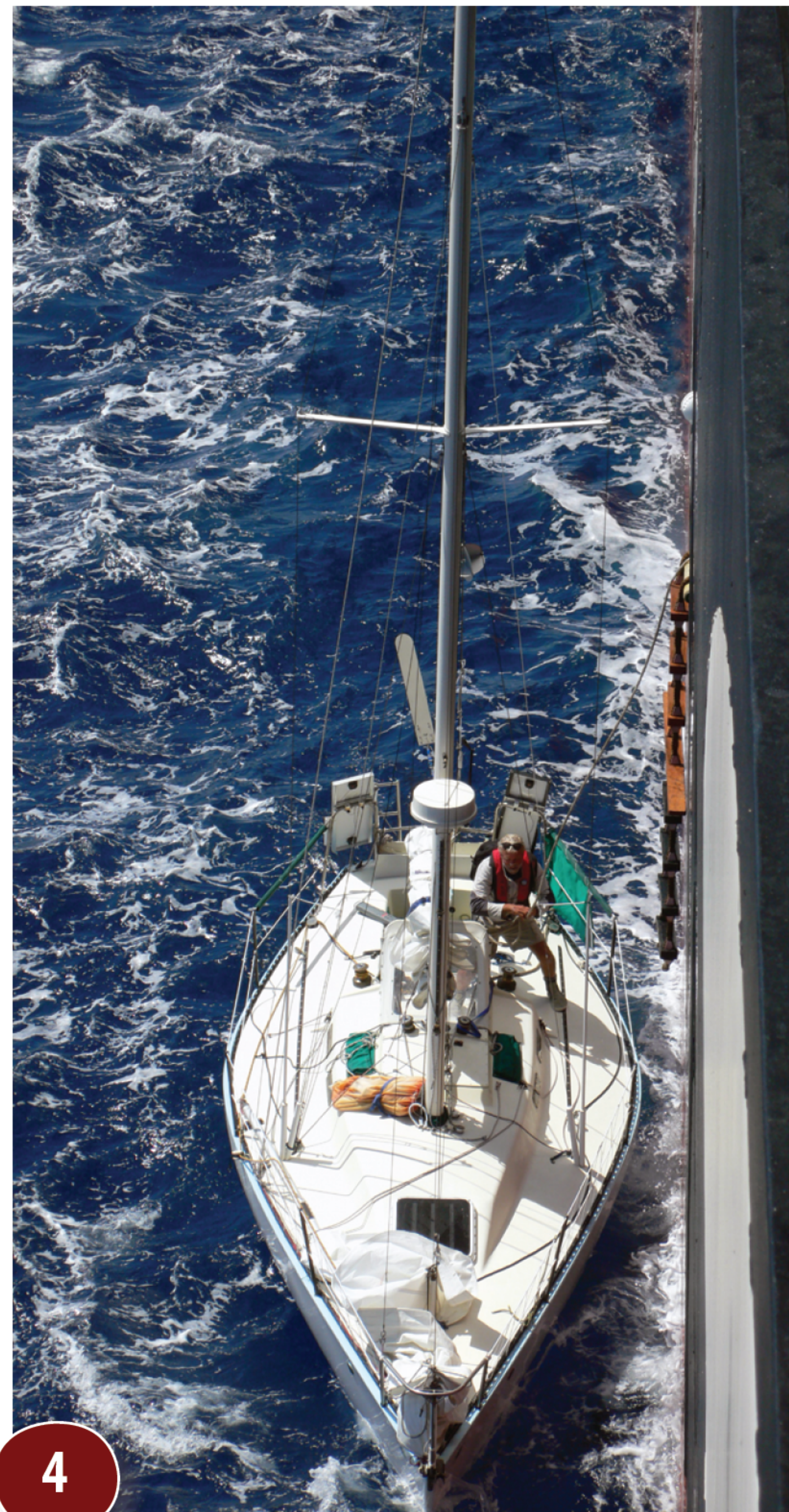
**A**ctively bringing a small boat near or alongside a large commercial ship in a gale at sea is not something that can be practiced. Even under ideal circumstances, it is a highly dangerous, heart in the throat, adrenaline-fueled action.

Implicit trust must be put in the captain of the ship that he will maintain his vessel quartering or beam to the wind and seas, providing a lee. Due to wave reflection, vessel wake, and underlying swell, a commercial ship's lee in a Force 9 gale is more similar to Plum Gut (Long Island Sound) or the Golden Gate on a good ebb than a marina entrance channel. A water-

proof, handheld VHF is mandatory for communication. Most captains prefer a speed of slow ahead to maintain control. Bow thrusters are used to assist in vessel control. In addition to forward speed, the ship will be making leeway due to windage, often 2 to 3 knots downwind, directly against the boat that has come alongside. This leeway will cause the small boat to press against the ship's side. Crew's limbs and bodies must not be placed between the small boat and the ship.

Unless the rescue is effected by a cruise ship with available RIB and trained operators, or is so urgent there is no option,

## SEAMANSHIP



ship masters of container ships and bulk carriers are hesitant about launching a lifeboat. In a gale, it is highly dangerous for them to retrieve a ship's lifeboat and crew. More likely is the method of throwing, or even shooting, a ¼-inch heaving line to the small boat. This can be used to transfer gear or people.

If the crew being transferred is incapacitated and cannot climb the pilot's ladder (in some rescues, cargo nets have been used in place of ladders), then the heaving line must be secured to the crew's harness so he can be hauled up the side of the ship.

The pictures above show the sequence of events during Skip's transfer from *Wildflower* to the *MSC Toronto*:

1. *Wildflower* moves into the ship's lee and prepares to motor alongside the tall *MSC Toronto*.
2. Both vessels maintain about 5 knots as *Wildflower* edges toward the pilot's ladder, which has already been dropped.
3. All is ready. *Wildflower* momentarily pulls away as Skip dashes below to pull the engine water intake to scuttle his boat.
4. Back alongside, Skip leaves the helm under autopilot and works his way toward the ladder.
5. Skip unclips his harness and grabs the ladder. The two vessels make contact.
6. With ship's papers and other essentials in his backpack, Skip climbs the container ship's ladder.