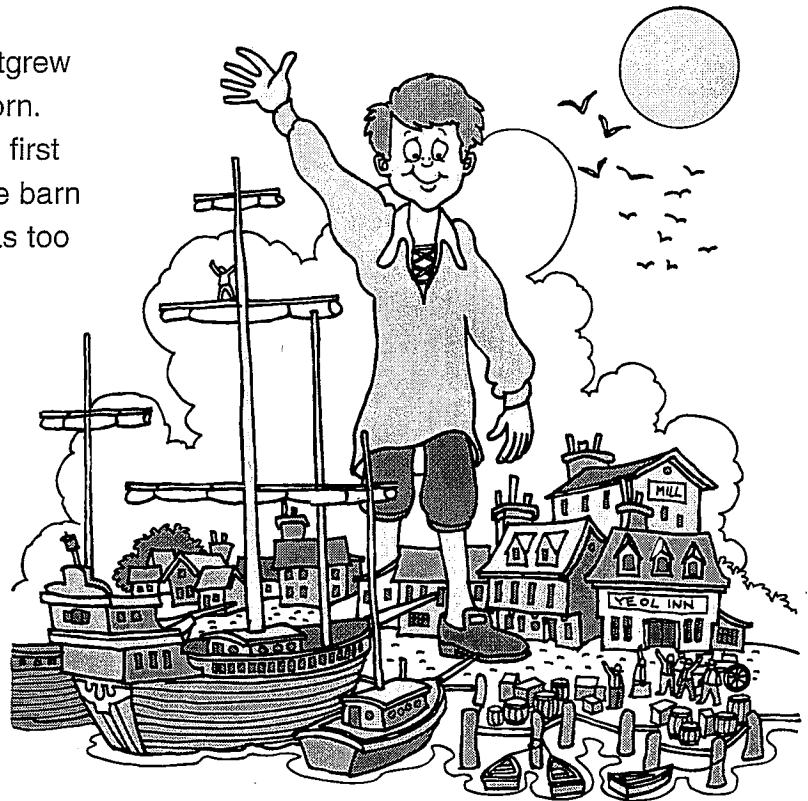


# Stormalong

## An American Tall Tale

**S**tormalong was a big baby. He outgrew his cradle a week after he was born. By the time Stormalong celebrated his first birthday, he had to sleep and eat in the barn with the horses because the house was too small. Before Stormalong blew out the candles on his second birthday cake, he was taller than the church steeple. When Stormalong was five years old, his mother knitted a hammock that stretched from New Bedford, Massachusetts, to Newport, Rhode Island. His father tied one end of the hammock to a giant pine tree in New Bedford and sailed down the coast to Newport. Then he fastened the other end to the top of an enormous chestnut tree.



“There, now,” said his mother. “It will take you a few years to outgrow this bed.”

Stormalong loved the sea and the ships. From his hammock bed, stretched between Massachusetts and Rhode Island, he could watch ships come and go. He knew when the fishing ships sailed into port and what they brought home. “The *Barstow* is on her way in with a load of halibut and cod,” he shouted when he saw the *Barstow* heading for land.

When the people in town heard Stormalong’s announcement, they rushed to the dock to buy fresh fish and welcome the crew home.

Stormalong knew all the ship captains. He signed up as cabin boy on the biggest ship he could find, the *Goliath*. All went well as long as he stayed in the middle of the ship. If he leaned over the port side of the ship, the crew had to run to the starboard side so the ship wouldn’t roll into the sea. Stormalong could scrub the decks, throw out the anchor, or turn the wheel faster than the rest of the crew.

By the time Stormalong was eleven, he had outgrown the *Goliath*. He decided to build the biggest ship that ever sailed the ocean. It would take many tons of lumber to construct a ship that large. Stormalong didn’t want to cut down all the trees near New Bedford. He liked the birds singing him to sleep each night when he slept in his hammock. He knew they needed trees

in which to build their nests. He solved the problem by chopping down three trees from each forest from the Atlantic Coast to Pennsylvania.

To earn money for food and tools, Stormalong carried basket loads of fish from ships anchored in the bay to the towns along the shore. The water was never higher than his knees. He talked to ship captains and learned all he could about the oceans and ships.

By the time Stormalong finished building his ship, he was thirteen. He'd taught himself everything there was to know about reading, math, and the stars. He didn't need a crew. He could do everything a hundred seamen could do and do it much faster at that. He signed on a crew of five cooks and four cats. The latter were to keep the rats from boarding the ship and the former were hired to prepare meals for Stormalong and the cats. He christened his ship *Colossus*.

When the ship was loaded with food and the sails were in place, Stormalong swam across the harbor and pulled the ship into deep ocean water. He climbed up the ship's ladder and set sail. The *Colossus* was as fast as it was large. In no time at all it had reached the tip of South America. The *Colossus* didn't quite make the turn when it tried to squeeze between South America and Antarctica. It rammed into South America and broke the tip into small islands and pieces of land. After that there was a passageway called a strait through South America. Smaller ships could sail between the islands and get from one side of South America to the other. It was a good shortcut.

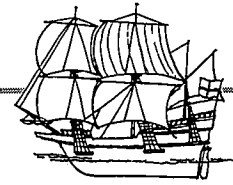
Stormalong sailed on to China, India, and many islands along the way. He traded for exquisite silks and finely decorated china dishes. He took on bags of pepper and tea leaves. In two months time he was back in New Bedford. He sold everything on the ship and became a very rich man. He tried to settle down on land, but he couldn't stay. It was too crowded. Everywhere he went he had to be careful he didn't step on a house or garden.

With his crew of cats and cooks, Stormalong sailed to the Caribbean Sea. Just as he was passing Florida, a tremendous hurricane tore at the sails of the *Colossus*. Ships sailing nearby were being tossed to and fro and swamped with water. Stormalong jumped overboard and swam through the towering waves. He piled as many boats as he could on the deck of the *Colossus*. He pulled sailors from the water and put them safely in the hold of his ship. The storm raged on.

Stormalong put the anchor chain between his teeth and swam toward Florida, pulling the ship against the wind and torrential rains. He pushed the ship up onto the beach, where waves dashed against it for two days and nights. When the storm finally wound down, the sailors climbed down the ladder of the *Colossus* to thank Stormalong.

After everyone had left the ship, Stormalong went back on board. He unfurled the sails to see if they could be repaired. A great wind, the last breath of the hurricane, hit the sails. The sails flapped like the wings of a giant albatross, lifting the ship and Stormalong into the sky. Stormalong waved good-bye and sailed off. If you look at the night sky, just as sailors often do, you might see the light from Stormalong's lantern flashing across the sky. That's the *Colossus* and Stormalong sailing across the immense ocean of air that surrounds the earth. It's the only sea big enough for a giant sailor and the largest ship that was ever built.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Questions about *Stormalong*

1. Stormalong's mother made him a special place to sleep. Describe it.

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2. Why did Stormalong decide to build his own boat? What was unique about the boat?

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3. What did Stormalong name his boat? Why do you think he chose that name?

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4. What happened when the *Colossus* tried to go around the tip of South America?

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5. Some people say Stormalong had a big heart. Why?

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6. In your own words, tell about Stormalong's Caribbean adventure. Use the back of the paper if you need more space.

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