

GYC MEMORABLE MEMORIES

The history of the Genesee Yacht Club can be recorded and reviewed in many ways. Instead of presenting factual, sequential descriptions of club events, it is equally and sometimes more important to just immerse ourselves in the personalities, characters of a few members, past and present.



1961 to 1972 and 2022

by Donald Messina

GYC Memorable Memories

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MEMORABLE MEMORIES of Some GYC MEMBERS
by Don Messina, 2019

i PREFACE

The history of the Genesee Yacht Club can be recorded and reviewed in many ways. Instead of presenting factual, sequential descriptions of club events, it is equally and sometimes more important to just immerse ourselves in the personalities, characters of a few members, past and present.

So, here are some of my vivid memories of a few amazing and also ordinary club members, from a wide span of years, who forever were/are part of the dynamics of the Genesee Yacht Club and life on the lower Genesee River. They are WHO we ARE!

ii DON MESSINA – HOW MY SAILING BEGAN



As a young history teacher at W. Irondequoit High School I was introduced to the world of sailing by a young student named Jay R.

Benford – now a noted naval architect – who brought many books to class dealing with classic sailing ships. With Jay sitting in the first seat closest to the door, I often was able to spend time with him before class would begin, and my interest was keen. Finally, later in the year Jay invited me to my very first sailing aboard his Dad's "FLYING DUTCHMAN", a 25-foot wooden sloop docked near the embankment near GYC.

That glorious May day with brilliant water beneath a blue sky, my experience of sheer pleasure and relaxation with the graceful sail of the boat gently parting the water stole my heart. No longer would I struggle again with playing golf! No! SAILING WAS FOR ME. So, I soon became a crew at the Newport Yacht Club, read my books on sailing, and finally in 1962 purchased a lovely green and white O'Day Day Sailer.

One day sailing with a young gal off Summerville, a large gray wooden, gaff rigged, 40 ft. sloop appeared heading toward us. As it got very close, I had to tack and my friend and I were shocked to see about 5 or 6 very gruff men dressed in overalls, flannel pants, and wool shirt and caps all guffawing at us! My friend screamed, "Do you know those guys?". Thus, began a series of barreling wild charges by the LORNA, that gray monster directly at EROICA, my little Day Sailer, responding with last second tacks. Incredibly we watched in horror as a gruff man climbed onto the bowsprit, as he violently swung a meat cleaver close to us gnarling a wild grin showing us his gold tooth!

With that frightening climax the LORNA broke off. Yet, despite the scare and slight jest of its crew, I was intrigued by that ship and days later I sauntered over to the west riverbank where she was tied up among the tall grasses, railroad and soot. There I happily met Whitey Roemer, the meat cleaver man, Lillian Roemer and many others. Soon, I had them all join me in "The International Casbah" and the "Castaways" costumed parties I organized and played piano for at Sammy's Bar.

Our mayhem hit its peak when we decided to take three boats onto Lake Ontario to make an original pirates' movie. "Pirates Lust" features

costumed actors with live action shot on 16 mm film. Riotous boarding scenes were all put to music created by Lillian Roemer. The program is now on DVD format and is now available at GYC for all to enjoy.

iii “The OLDE GENESEE YACHT CLUB — Some thoughts”

In the 1930’s, or thereabouts, what became known as the Genesee Yacht Club was first formed by a small group of sailors who found “dockage” of sorts along the Genesee River and who casually met at their homes.

This small group eventually acquired some of the territory at the southern end of our present property to secure dockage rights and soon a club house was desired there. In 1934 when the construction downtown of the Rundel Library was completed, the workers' shed at the site was no longer needed. Thus, quickly, the GYC members purchased the building for \$50 and had it moved to our present site! (Remember when a nickel bought a pint of beer?)

The club house was located a few yards south of the present haul/launch area and about 30 feet from the river with many improvements planned. As soon as monies could be raised for materials, the roof was raised, a screened porch was added facing west, a stone fireplace was built to the north, and behind the meeting room, a small bar, kitchen and lavatory were added or improved from the original.

Actually, my first recollection of the entire setting around the club occurred when I enjoyed my first sail courtesy of a fine history student of mine in May of 1959, Jay R. Benford, now a leading naval architect! His Dad’s “FLYING DUTCHMAN” was a 24ft/ wood sloop with brass ports, cuddled close to and parallel to the embankment, rich with grasses, bushes, and trees nearby. Our picture-perfect sailing smoothly on a sunny afternoon convinced me to give up golf and make sailing my life's goal and dream. After crewing at Newport Yacht Club and buying and sailing a 1962 Day Sailer and capsizing it twice, I bought my Seafarer 24 in 1972.

When I first joined the club in 1972, to me I was taken aback by it all. At the meetings, it all seemed a somewhat glorified boys' hideout in the woods! The rustic and bucolic setting could be very deceptive.

Once the meetings began at GYC, "the boys became boys!" From a decrepit refrigerator next to the bar, seamless endless quantities of 25 cent Genesee beer cans came out into many hands. The beer flowed! Handshakes and back-slaps abounded! Eyes became glazed! Tongues loosened and wagged! Roars of laughter burst forth with jokes spoken!

Soon, alcohol would prevail! Sometimes during the meetings, dissension occurred. Strong, sometime violent outbursts would occur over policies with heated arguments, accusations, etc. All I could reason was that "these boys" were pretty frustrated husbands or fathers, and that obviously GYC provided perhaps a necessary emotional safety valve! Whew!

At times I thought the walls would burst outward from the spirited words resounding inside as the Commodore would pound his gavel repeatedly during the dull roar of chatter at the bar and kitchen which seldom quieted down.

Coming at that time from a quiet background living with my widowed mother, I experienced a mixture of good humor and friendship, especially with fine members on non-meeting events at the club -- but often bad tempers at meetings! Thus, the "Olde Genesee Yacht Club!"

Yes, the 1934 shed-club house was a "darn nice place ---- for the times!"

1. NICK YOUTCHAS



Dick Wild and Nick Youtchas on Voila

In 1972 soon after I purchased my new Seafarer 24, “ESPERANZA,” and joined GYC, in my thirties, I found myself looking up to veteran GYC sailors who exuded great sailing skills and just talked like “old salts.” Among them, I actually feared, and admired, Caesar “Nick” Youtchas. I was led to believe he was of Russian descent which led me to believe that he was extraordinarily courageous. A burly fellow, he also was quite outspoken in his views. A bit gruff and impatient with me when I asked some questions or “needed a little help” with my boat.

Yet, despite this tough facade, I gradually began to like Nick because of his unique sailing of “Bacchante”, his 26-foot sleek Knickerbocker sloop, docked on the river in front of GYC. Certainly, Nick was the most active GYC sailor in the '70's and a bit later, going out onto the lake almost

every day during the season.

All of the members were truly in awe of Nick, observing his great sailing skills. Each sail he would depart up and return down the river—dock-to-dock---ONLY with sail, never using an outboard motor he kept on board! Such “artistry” was perfected as we would often watch, holding our breaths a bit, as Nick deftly executed short, sharp tacks with light airs in the narrows between the railroad swing bridge and shore...and, finally, sailing slowly into his river dock! “Pure ballet, amazing!

A great but serene joy always arose within me sailing my sloop whenever “Bacchante” was under way, fairly close by. For then I was inspired by a significant sight---- Nick would be sailing seated on the lee side of his cockpit, his left forearm smoothly resting on the lee coaming or deck, right hand behind him a bit on the tiller, all while he seriously looked up for the proper roach of his mainsail ... perfect contentment! His love for sailing his “Bacchante” was a wonderful tribute to him and an inspiration to me. I will never forget it! I can see it now!

2. WALTER PENZ



Walt Penz was a sort of newcomer from Buffalo whom I met one gray fall day (late "70's?) as I scraped the rust off my boat's storage cradle in preparation for a paint job before haul-out. Slowly a large, old model vehicle came into view in Voyager's yard, and a rather somber-faced gent looked to his left out the window, slowed more, gave a slight nod, and stopped to talk. I was impressed as he seemed so genuinely calm and understanding of my "haul-out blues." I finally remarked on how friendlier he seemed to me than local folk, so I asked him "Where are you from?" In a semi-hoarse almost muffled sound, he replied, "I'mmm, fruem Bfff-lo" (I'm from Buffalo!).

Well, as I sporadically saw or met Walter after he soon joined the GYC, I grew to greatly appreciate his warmth and genuine friendship. So did many other GYC members as Walter sailed and raced his Columbia 26, "Puppy Love." Moreover, he was kind to many members using his skills to help us whenever he could, even completely installing/connecting my new VHF radio and antenna. Beset with some personal issue, we suddenly, sadly lost Walt and his humble graciousness, "well before his time."

3. RAY KOHLER

In 1973, a year after I joined GYC, Ray Kohler also joined, and we soon became friends as he was so jovial and always kind. His love of sailing was infectious as he often talked about and planned to get his ideal boat...a 30-something foot Gulfstar motor sailer.

No sooner did he take ownership of the craft that a mishap occurred. Like some of us who enjoy the shorelines, he once sailed close to Rock Beach on an easterly course. Unfortunately, he ran his boat into the that infamous "Turtle Rock", a few hundred feet off the NE shore of the beach, ruptured his keel and nearly sank his craft as the ballast of small aluminum discs descended but not until a quick tow rescued the craft and him to a haul-out area on the river.

Yes, the boat was repaired... but... sadly... unknown to many then, Ray was very sick, and passed away shortly thereafter. He did get to buy and enjoy his dream boat...but for only for a very short time.

4. MIKE CHIRCO



I recall Mike Chirco because, like me, he was a school teacher and eventually an administrator. Mike, a veteran of World War II, occasionally sailed a 28 foot cat rigged boat, often docked across the river from the club. He was a very quiet, gentle man who experienced so much hardship in the war that he ended up writing a well-known book, "The Diary of a Foxhole". He loved the waters we live with and settled and died in his Lakeshore Blvd. home.

5. LILLIAN ROEMER



Although the wives of GYC members have long been supportive of club activities, it was in the 1970's that many became more actively involved. In the case of Lillian Roemer, her husband Craig Roemer became a

member in 1975 but Lillian was more of a member in many ways. With their purchase of a Dutch-built Contest 30 which they named, "Sea-roemer", a schism occurred. Soon, because of Craig's dislike of cruising, etc. the boat essentially became Lillian's joy especially as she used it to help GYC.

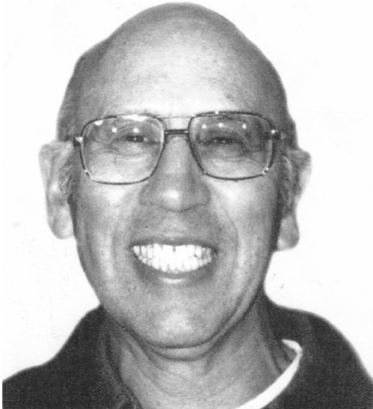
So, for a few who got to know her well, Lillian's by-word could be "S.T.O.U.T". First and foremost, Lillian was "S," a "seafarer," a most zealous sailor. Not only did she love sailing but was active with the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse organization. "T" Lillian was very "talented" and had many skills including lapidary and narrating the scrip and selecting a music sound-track for the nautical movie, "Pirates Lust." Then, "O" -- For most at GYC, Lillian was most "outgoing" and very friendly. Moreover, she also was noted for being "U" very "understanding," --, kind-hearted and accepting.

However, Lillian became a legend in her time at GYC during an event where she proved extremely loyal, dedicated and extraordinarily "T" -- "TENACIOUS!" For one Scotch Bonnet Light Race, Lillian volunteered to skipper "Sea-roemer" as Finish Line boat. However, as the time came and she motored her boat just past the Charlotte pier and anchored, a fierce lake storm began to build. Soon, she and "Sea-roemer" were heaving and yawing in over 35 knot winds and 3 to 4 ft. waves. Several race committee members and flag officers expressed concern after many hours of such conditions and throughout the howling black night. "How is Lillian holding out? Should we call her back to the club?" It was most trying for everyone. Nevertheless, Lillian endured her suffering and hardship and stayed at the finish line until the last boat safely returned. Her seamanship and dedication should always be remembered and honored at GYC.

Lillian's attitude and dedication to sailing were indeed remarkable. Her cheerful, friendly ways were always blended with bravery and respect for the sea. After my sailing the lake in the non-predicted 55 mph winds and 14 ft. waves of "Hurricane Agnes", August, 1972, she said, "Well, you try to plan well...but then...you take your chances!!"

FINAL THOUGHTS: Today Lillian should be remembered for her passion for boating which is expressed in her 1995 book on past ferry boats, "Remembering ONTARIO 1 and Ontario 2—43 years of sailing Lake Ontario in calm, gales and ice." Moreover, Lillian Roemer is a heroic prototype. Her independent, free spirit, shown in her activities and presence in the club, not only earned everyone's respect but it also helped push the door farther open for the GYC to happily benefit from the "equal presence and participation" of women in the club.

6. ARTHUR WACHS



In 1971 Art Wachs joined the GYC, eager to do some sailing and enjoy respite from his job at the City of Rochester School District motor pool. He was happy to buy a small Bristol 22 cabin sloop he named "WIND FALL" but soon found a new, informal vocation as a sort of "GYC Godfather."

This term is most appropriate because Art's extremely generous heart and caring personality became inspired and unstoppable whenever he was at the club. No matter what the situation, or how difficult, whenever anyone was in need of help or there was a club project or emergency, Arthur was always there and first to lend a hand. I testify to this from personal experiences, docking next to his boat and, later, his

15

Nonsuch 26, "MY ARK."

For over 20 years of such efforts, Art was always acting with concern and often with a most cheerful and encouraging attitude. Art served as Commodore in 1975 and worked hard as club treasurer 1982-1990. His stellar love for GYC and brotherhood with the membership were later recognized, most appropriately, with the creation of the coveted, perpetual "Art Wachs Award!"

MEMORIAM: The fraternal concern and kindness I received for decades from Art are immense, unforgettable! One poignant event deserves mention here as illustration. It occurred as Art was dying and we tried to "stay in touch." Bedridden in his lovely Rock Beach front home (with wife Nancy nearby), Art enjoyed seeing me sail "ESPERANZA" a few times eastward towards Durand Beach and he would enjoy hailing me, despite his pain, to chat cheerfully, from his bed, with his hand-held VHF! Always reaching out, encouraging me loving the lake.... that was Arthur

Yes, a precious, priceless memory...of a most dear friend! My GYC "Godfather," Art Wachs.

7. PETER ALLEN DIES ON CHRISTMAS MORNING



Peter Allen dies on Christmas morning! What a blessed moment to leave this world---flying up to meet the Lord Jesus!

This is all I can say in tribute to one of my best friends ever at the

Genesee Yacht Club. Truly, Peter belongs with the angels above. Here is a man of great intellect and intelligence, blended with excellent speaking skills and united in his heart with all that was good for others, for the GYC....and for me.

Peter was the illustrious founder and avid promoter of the famous Scotch Bonnet Light Race. This is his foremost distinguishing contribution to the Genesee Yacht Club--a tradition which still lives on.

Yet, for me I cherish the fond memories of Peter laboriously writing and drawing articles to help me improve my sailing -- from articles on jiffy reefing, and other suggestions to expanding many of my sailing skills. All were done with a deep expression of concern for me and my fledgling sailing skills. His was a Godfather-to-son friendship which still deeply touches me.

I recall a visit to his lovely home overlooking part of Irondequoit Bay which expressed so much of his love for the water and sailing. My memories of Peter Allen -- may I always wish him a snug harbor in the heavens above!

Don Messina 12/29/20

From Peter himself; he wrote the following as the event founder this was in our history book and is part of the history on the Scotch Bonnet web site.

From Peter O. Allen Sr., Event Founder... I thought long distance racing made some sense, as we were sailing boats with galleys, heads and berths. There just weren't many choices in destinations for such races. Sailing along the shore to Sodus Bay or Oak Orchard didn't seem to be all that much of a navigational challenge. There were no buoys out in the lake to which one could race. The nearest object that one could sail around and then return to Rochester seemed to be Scotch Bonnet Island, off the Canadian shore. Why not go there? [At a time before Loran or GPS] Few of us even had dedicated chart tables back then. The largest boats racing in the club in those days were in the 25' to 27' range. So, as a test of navigation skills, as well as those other skills involved in sailboat racing, the Scotch Bonnet Race was born in 1972. The original course

was direct to the island and back. The first race started early Saturday morning. With such small, slow boats this would clearly be an overnight race. I think we might have had five boats. The following year we might have had six boats, again starting on Saturday morning.

For the history he later added:

Thanks to the many people who have championed the event and provided many hours of volunteer time to its care and feeding over the intervening years. Who would have thought?

8. JOHN and CATHY ANDERSEN



It is indeed a double blessing to have gifted members in GYC who provide unique service and joy...as a married couple. And so, it is with the Andersen's—John and Cathy.

For ever since the annual fall Oktoberfest celebration began, John and Cathy have been a main driving force. They do a great deal of work in helping to organize and prepare, helping the mainstay Oktoberfest

couple, Burt and Elaine Ringlestein. Dressed in lederhosen, John actively circulates to the various tables to pour beer, pass out pretzels and desserts, etc. and cheer the folks on, as Cathy, in her Dirndl, handles reservations and tickets at the door, etc.

Ja! Sehr Gut, John und Cathy! PROSIT!

Moreover, John has become one of our few most memorable “Blue Water” sailors ever in the history of GYC. It must be the call of his ancestral Scandinavian genes or heritage which have so inspired him. Being GYC Treasurer 2011-2017 and sailing Lake Ontario were not enough of a challenge to this Nordic soul, so, in 2007 he joined a small crew of the “Mahina Tiara” to sail for TWO WEEKS above the ARCTIC CIRCLE in frigid waters amidst ice flows, glaciers and polar bears, even braving a swim in the 35-degree temp. waters! It was all under the summer Midnight Sun.

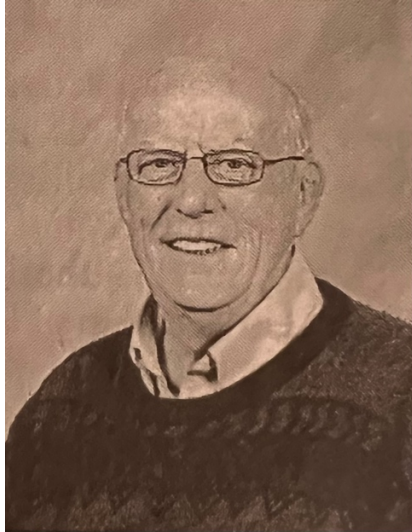
In 2008 John sought other challenges joining as “watch captain” on a Saga 43 sailing in a race from Stonington, CT to Booth Bay Harbor, Maine, coming in 2nd place. Then, seeking more of the Atlantic Ocean, he crewed on a Jeanneau Sunfast 3200, “UPSTART” with Canadian friends in June 2012 for the 752 nautical mile race from Annapolis, MD to Bermuda. Although they had a mix of weather and winds, the worst was yet to come. On the return (transport) sail to Newport, John and his skipper were pushed to their limits enduring a series of storms, winds of over 40 knots, many sail changes and struggling with TWO torn sails.... a 14-hour epic for sure!

Our brave John remained undaunted, so again, in 2013, he took part in the Bermuda One-Two Race. Skipper Bert Barrett raced single-handed Newport to Bermuda; then Bert and John raced double-handed back to Newport, covering some 635 nautical miles each way! They returned in 2017 to do it all again but, in subsequent years, found several Lake Ontario 600 races to be challenging enough. Certainly, such a challenge is not for the faint of heart nor the average racer or cruiser.

(Tony Gambacurta added) John has won the Stewart Trophy for the Scotch Bonnet Light Race, best corrected time of the GO fleet, 6 times, 4 of those were single handed.

So, bravo, John for your superb seamanship, and always modest, friendly sharing of your neo-Viking exploits. GYC salutes you and Cathy for all you both mean and give to the GYC.

9. EDWARD KOWALSKI



Certainly, each member of the Genesee Yacht Club is a unique individual. In the case of one Ed Kowalski, (1979) just the mention of his name should stir a special feeling or thought about this very unique member who touched so many hearts. Perhaps this is because Ed had left the priesthood.

It seemed that in his search for his true self, his proper place in life, sailing and the lake were to be important parts of the picture. In addition to his small cottage near Lake Ontario on Bateau Terrace, Ed became the owner of an AQUARIUS 23, whom he gave the zestful name, "ATTA BABY."

While Ed enjoyed sailing with GYC, his sailing was a relaxed style which matched his warm, friendly personality which favored good personal contacts above all. His best expressions of this were two-fold. Every month Ed would reserve GYC for a large dinner gathering of much of his Kowalski family. This was such a fine event that GYC members casually being nearby at the club were sort of cheered at the sight of such family love and togetherness. Therefore, it was most fitting after Ed passed away that the club invited all of the Kowalski family to have a large memorial/last dinner at the club ---- a fitting tribute indeed.

However, having spent many visits with Ed in his last years – talking about life, illnesses, my concerts, my CD's, club affair, etc.---my loss of his fatherly friendship is real...in ways hard to describe. For me the best thing to do is to remind you of Ed Kowalski's greatest gifts to GYC. His poignant prayer that he gave at the Memorial Day 2006 raising of the Flag ceremony. I beg GYC to preserve and to re-use this...

“MEMORIAL DAY GYC PRAYER-- 2006”

O great God of love, listen to us now, as we seek your peace....

Be with us and begin with us, the living, that we may work together as one for the good of our sailing Club.

Guide the leaders of our Club that they may lead wisely.

Help us all to take the high road in a generous spirit of cooperation among ourselves.

You have given us the great joy of boating and sailing; and, as our boats reach out for the waves, keep us happy and safe during the sailing season that has now begun.

Secondly, Lord, in sadness we remember those who walk with us no more:

First, we call to mind those Americans specially remembered at this memorial time. Military veterans of all wars. Those men and women whose lives were snuffed out in the flower of their youth.

We also remember those who have suffered injury in war — and we honor all those veterans as well who were fortunate enough to return home in health, but who had been willing to risk their own lives for their country. For veterans and civilians both, for all who are victims of war.....we pray.

And, finally, here in our own Club...in our GYC Family...we raise a special prayer for all deceased members of the Club including family members and close friends. We think especially of those who died within the past year. Grant Your healing power to their loved ones.

We ask You to heal the scars of grief in all of us that we may walk calmly in the path of hope.

And so, thankful for the lives of those departed, and for their camaraderie....

We wish them a happy journey...a voyage that will bring them to the joys of paradise...

May you raise them up on eagles' wings.....and bear them on the breath of dawn,

And make them to shine like the sun,

And hold them in the Palm of Your hand. Amen.

(Ed Kowalski)

10. KENNETH "KEN" GJERSOE (Pronounced jer-so)



Ken Gjersoe - 1984

Ken Gjersoe was certainly a most “outstanding” GYC member during the few years we knew him. Ken was a tall, husky, friendly sailor of true Norse dimensions. Proud of his Norwegian sailing heritage, Ken was in a sense bigger than life. Although he was younger than I, Ken quickly earned my respect and admiration, and that of everyone at GYC, especially for his knowledge of engineering and sailing. As the area salesman for Seafarer Yachts he sold me my Seafarer 24 in 1972 and showed great kindness to me in counseling and advising me, as a Corinthian (sailor) and nervous, new member. He really became a sort of Big Godfather to me.

An extroverted young man of enormous charm and energy, Ken had a beautiful wife and two lovely young daughters. He skippered a mustard color Grampian 26 named “VITAMIN E.” He sailed with gusto, especially when he took part in the notorious 'VIKINGS' REVENGE”--a cruise of young, often uncouth guys who sailed across the lake to Canada once a year with a brief stop for partying, and then sailed back to Rochester.

How well I recall one such event. It occurred one mid-summer afternoon as I was returning to GYC under sail. Somewhere near RYC I heard a faint, wailing distant sound from the lake, which sent shivers up my spine. The sound was unreal, "other-worldly, eerie, sinister. "Goodness," I thought to myself, "it sounds almost like tortured, ravenous cannibals wailing and moaning, What's out there?" I wondered turning my shoulders and head as far back as I could. Then I spied 3 or 4 sailboats approaching the mouth of the river with crew members in loose array, some partly draped over the gunnels. Yes, it was Ken and his many drunken friends shouting calls in hoarse voices mixed with roughly singing songs off-key---yes, another Vikings Revenge!

Energetic as he was, Ken saw a potential for profit and fun with his questionable contacts among various characters on the west bank of the Genesee with its sooty, oil-spilling railroad and honky-tonk saloons. He quickly got some leases for a little west bank land, just north of the bridge and set up the "Portside Dock and Wharf Company". It was quite a sight to see this self-styled commodore with his new toy, a small clunky tugboat which he proudly chugged up and down the river in front of GYC. It was a short-lived venture, however.

Ken soon became such a good friend of mine that he readily took part in two of my outlandish parties at Sammy's Bar (later, "Scuttlebutts"). One event was the costumed gathering called, "The Castaways," and later a more creative production of mine, the "International Casbah" (in which I was fortunate and pleased to present a modest but gracious dance by a black Exotic - "Sheba"-- in a partial white silk costume as her pleasant husband, a friend I had met earlier, observed "protectively"!). Happily sharing in both parties were GYC folks like Craig "Whitey" Roemer and Lillian Roemer and a wide assortment of their eccentric friends.

In addition to me playing the piano and leading in song at these events, Ken Gjersoe generously contributed his share of happy songs, enthusiastically strumming his guitar and with sweat dripping from his face, chatting with my unconventional costumed friends and a few local rift-raft who happened to drop in at the bar during such revelries. Their

“driftwood” appearance was a welcomed addition to the creative, escapist atmosphere my friends and I desired at these celebrations. In profound gratitude for all the enjoyment my parties gave to Sam Bonnacci, the owner, he once refused payment for all the pizzas I had him serve to the guests. “Forget it, Don,” he said to me. “You gave me a great time!”

Sadly, my mentor and our GYC Norse hero was not well—personal sorrows (divorce) and, despite his energy, other factors took their toll. One day at GYC Ken was sitting on the back-side wall of a pickup truck talking sporadically to a few people who were walking past the truck. At one point, someone turned around and Ken vanished from sight. Only his shoes were visible from the edge of the truck. Ken suddenly died and collapsed, falling backward into the truck.

Our hero was no longer.

11. DON WULF---FINE LEADERSHIP and SPIRIT



Perhaps many who knew Don Wulf primarily think of him as skipper of his 26 ft. Chrysler sloop with the comical mainsail cover sporting an image of Groucho Marx, cigar in mouth, with the large, printed name, 'PANATELLA' streaming across the boat cover! I myself must admit a limited knowledge of Don as he often was a gentle person of few words, despite being close dock neighbors.

Thankfully, a few do recall, and now I am able to describe, how Don Wulf was a key force in the development of the Genesee Yacht Club. After joining GYC in 1976, he later became a sort of “man of the hour” as new challenges and needs arose for the club...and someone had to show the way! Rising as Commodore in 1985, Don became the project manager in 1985 during the construction of the new club house, and, moreover, led the construction of the new GYC porch in 1989, again as project manager. His skills, technical knowledge and leadership were keys to the successes of these major milestones in the upgrading of GYC.

Fortunately, Don did have time to also display his prowess as a sailor. He was an avid GYC racer, especially as a GO racer and even won a championship. He often took part in the SBLR races as well.

However, his recent passing in 2016 is a great loss to the club. Not only do we still benefit today from his construction skills and leadership in our facilities, but there is more. It was Don who exhibited so much of the spirit and hospitality of GYC that he uniquely energized the club in multiple ways to lead us into a very successful 75th Anniversary celebration of GYC.

We all owe much to Don Wulf and his great contributions of self to the Genesee Yacht Club!

12. BOB and DEE SMITH



Bob Smith – working on tearing down the old clubhouse



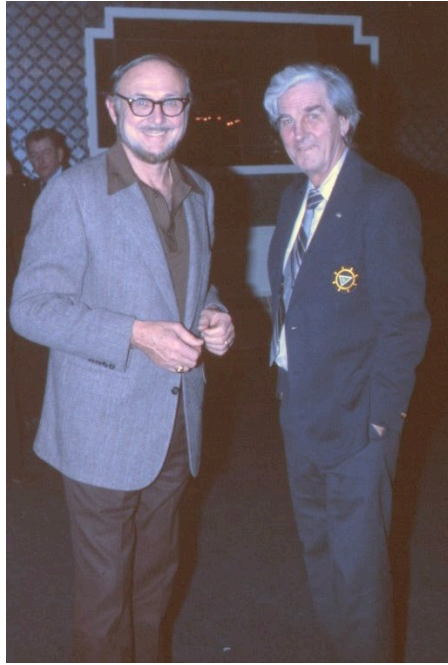
As I first joined GYC in the 1970's I quickly came to wonder about and also admire a most unusual and loyal couple, Bob and Dee Smith. It was a wonder to me as I gradually got to realize that they spent virtually most of their daylight hours at the club. It was evident that GYC was a special place in their lives, a second home. They had a 30-foot sloop but seldom sailed. It seemed as though they were so very content just to be here for many hours.

Most noticeable, to me, is that they often paid close scrutiny to the

condition of the club house, the docks and the yard, and saw to it that club rule were enforced. One example was when I went on an overnight to Irondequoit Bay on my boat and returned late the following day. Bob was upset that I did not sign out the use of my dock for visiting boats to use. Yup, he checked up on everything!

However, Bob and Dee were also very kind and compassionate whenever a GYC member was in need. More on this when you read about a GYC member named Jack Lee.

13. FRANCIS "JACK" LEE



Among the most vibrant and ever-lasting impressions I have ever had of GYC members came from knowing Jack Lee, who joined GYC in 1967. No member ever had such a sharp, commanding persona as Jack. Tall, lanky, of ruddy weather-beaten facial features, twinkling blue eyes and a sort of kind but tense tone to his voice — meeting him to me meant facing a mighty force, a potential human volcano.

Jack always loved to talk and sometimes rightly complain about things. Intelligent, eloquent, and direct—that was Jack—this was the guy who once in talking about politics said, “For me, my greatest enemy is the American government!”

However, despite all of this, Jack was always most kind and respectful, and always supportive of my kind of sailing, for he was a true sailor at heart. He was very proud of his green Hinterholler 24 Shark that he named “HAMMERHEAD.” He sailed it quite often and very well. Besides winning races, he amazed me when GYC once had a race to Sodus Bay and despite competing against a large fleet of bigger boats with crew, Jack, sailing solo, won and came in FIRST over all!!

His love for the sea was profound. I well remember when he described a solo night sail he once did: “On that beautiful night, looking up at the stars in great wonder...well...I really just don't need to find God or go to church... Out there, sailing under the stars.....is...my church.” It was a profound expression I will never forget.

Finally, Jack demonstrated many ways to me that he had to be a part of “The Greatest Generation” and also one touched by the Great Depression. Somehow, his marriage ran into trouble and he was thrown out of his little home in the Rock Beach/Summerville area. With seemingly nowhere to go, believe it or not, Jack “moved into” the tiny cabin of “HAMMERHEAD” for his new home! I will never, ever forget coming to the club during the winter, snow falling, and there was “HAMMERHEAD,” the only boat on the icy river in front of GYC, a thin plastic tarp draped over part of the boom. I wondered how in the world he could ever survive in such cold! Well, “God provides,” as some people say, and around that same time I learned that Bob and Dee Smith would come to visit Jack every morning to bring him a warm breakfast and some hot coffee!

Such are the fortunes of life and how our GYC “family membership” provides.

14. WILLIAM "BILL" STATT



The Genesee Yacht Club had its share of members in World War II, some killed in action, as our Robert Read, a Navy aviator. His widow, Marion, later married our famous maestro of solo sailing, Nick Youtchas, whose daughter Ann is now the wife of Bill Bibbens---small world!

However, no veteran ever held such a role in the life of the Genesee Yacht Club as Bill Statt.

Bill joined the club in 1968 and we last knew him as skipper for the blue-hull "Chutzpah," which he often raced and did extensive cruises. Bill was, as one member has called him, the "spark plug" of the Genesee Yacht Club. Bill had enormous energy, several skills and great

leadership qualities, even becoming Commodore. However, whatever the situation or problem occurred, it seemed Bill was always there to help, to lead and to help organize others in many tasks and projects to improve the club for about 40 years! Even in his last years, Bill loved to come and just “hang out” at GYC, his home on the river.

As a survivor of the great Battle of the Bulge in 1942, where about 40,000 Americans were killed, Bill was very active in the creation of the Battle of the Bulge Memorial located at the entrance to Ontario Beach parking lot, Lake Ave. at Beach Ave. Every Memorial Day or July 4th ceremony, Bill always attended, joining other veterans and the public at the Memorial---- still spirited, still in shape wearing his brown Army World War II uniform. A great inspiration.

Moreover, Bill may best be remembered as just having a great personal concern for each of our members. He quickly met my widowed mother at a few club events, and although I had been a member nearly 40 years when she died in 2004, Bill was one of only two members who came to comfort me at her funeral. He really understood (from those few meetings) how close my mother and I were. He cared. He was there for me in my loss. He always cared for each GYC member.

15. JEFFREY "JEFF" PECK



Without question one of our most bold and dashing GYC sailors was Jeff Peck. Jeff was a lively bundle of energy and cheer. Everyone knew when he was around. He was so friendly and helpful. His love for sailing in his C&C 26, "Knotbad" was expressed in his many races. Most notable of all was his desire for competition and pushing himself to the limits of skill and endurance.

When time came to do the Scotch Bonnet Light Race, Jeff relished the challenge and prepared well. More than once, Jeff entered, and solo sailed the entire Scotch Bonnet Light Race across the lake, around the Scotch Bonnet Light Tower and back to Rochester! Yes, *solo!* An enormous feat of endurance, seamanship, and pure love for and devotion to sailing.

16. ROBERT "BOB" DU BERT

Probably a few may recall seeing a sailboat on the lake years ago which flew a spinnaker with a very large red blotch or "blob" covering much of the fabric. Well, that "blob" really had 5 stubby arms to symbolize the name of the ship, "STARFISH." Somewhat equally "blobby"- built, but always very pleasant, was its skipper, Bob Du Bert, who joined GYC in 1972. Although he enjoyed his sailing here, he soon retired to Port Orange, Florida, but it was not easy.

Bob appreciated his CS-30 so much he struggled with thoughts of having the keel cut short to accommodate the boat in his local Florida waters. However, realizing the impracticality of that, he sold the boat and purchased a shallow draft O'Day 30, and got a few GYC members to join him in taking the boat through the Inter-Coastal Waterway to Florida. Jack Lee was one of the crew, and word soon got back to us here about how arduous a trip it was. A sharp November cold snap hit along the way. Everyone on board shivered, suffered and cursed Bob for not buying a portable space heater at one of the marinas for a night stop. Well...sailing...

One time, Bob returned to GYC for a brief visit. As he came down the dock walkway east toward my boat, he saw me preparing to depart and

asked if he could join me. After I said OK, he asked me to wait few seconds. He departed and soon returned, beer can in hand and came on board asking me to do him a favor. When I agreed, he merely said to just sail out, go east and parallel to the Durand Eastman Beach. At that area, he then said for me to turn to port and go north.

As we headed north about 1 ½ miles, his purpose was made clear: “Here,” he said, “It’s about here, Don, do you know, that we scattered the ashes of Walter Penz?” Then lowering the beer can over the starboard side, he tipped it a few times, pouring a few ounces into the waters as he said, “Here, Walt...here,...this is for..you.” It was a tender moment, on a sunny day, I will always remember.

ADDENDUM: Some other GYC members whose ashes were scattered on Lake Ontario are Ken Gjersoe and Ernie Coleman. There may well be or will be others.

17. BURTNER and BEACH—DEATH DEFYING DUO!



You can forget the “Ides of March” because, even worse for sailors, can be the “Nastiness of November.” Besides the tragedy of lake freighter EDMUND FITZGERALD, sunk in November on Lake Superior some of us have a short memory...or even choose to risk and defy death!

Well, such was the case in November of 2009 when two young GYC “strapping sailors” did what dearly departed friend, GYC’s Lillian Roemer, once commented about sailing.

“Cruising?” she said to me one time, “You plan well...and then...you

take your chances!”

Thus, Neal Burtner decided to sail his Dickerson 36 from Chesapeake Bay to Tortola, British Virgin Islands, with Tom Beach (and one Chip Pittman) as crew. Soon their 11-day cruise became a horrendous nearly endless challenge of 40-kt winds and 30-foot seas! The storm stresses resulted in a fire in the binnacle and loss of refrigeration. But the worst was yet to come. They were robbed in Tortola and later, sailing in that area, they hit a reef and lost their rudder, while almost losing control and crashing on some rocks! Truly, Neal and Tom defied death, unplanned as it was. Yes, they are with us today!

Fate, however, can be kind - at odd times - and Tom is always happy to recall that during the mayhem of that cruise he caught a 45-inch Mahi Mahi which also provided good nourishment for a few days!

ED NOTE: This author cannot criticize with any wisdom or superiority.

In 1972 new GYC member, Don Messina (yeah, me!) went from 9 years of day sailing to take his first cruise with his new Seafarer 24 “ESPERANZA,” with smiling Jack Degnan as crew. The first 2 days there were thunderstorms all along the way to Sodus and Oswego. The third day they sailed from Oswego to Henderson. Shortly after departure the winds quickly increased, and he was hit by HURRICANE AGNES, 55 mph winds, 14 ft waves!!

With sails down and motoring only with a 7.5 hp outboard, the storm strain was exhausting and fearsome. Then, as storm surge covered the land from the Sackett's light to the harbor, Don realized late, but just in time to turn and go broadside to the waves, around that light. Then *disaster*: a 14-ft wave hit and totally swamped the boat. Only a miracle saved them as the swamped stern outboard continued to run under water for about 2 minutes as the waters slowly drained through the cockpit scupper and the boat rose slowly, saving them from a rocky shore only yards away!! Sadly, there was no forecast of this, only a report for 15 knot winds and some showers. Yup, that was 1972 weather science! Oh, one can't forget this, it occurred the first week of August, the start of Hurricane Season!!!

18. ERNIE COLEMAN



One of GYC's most well-known and respected sailors for many years was Ernie Coleman. He was a veteran sailor in the complete sense, since he served in World War II in the Pacific aboard the ship, "Vincennes." His ship was attacked at night and was sunk, however, Ernie told me he dived into the burning oil and swam under water as far as he could to reach clear water. Sadly, many of his shipmates suffered a painful end in those flames and shark-infested waters.

Everyone was so glad Ernie survived and in 1976 joined GYC. Soon his expert sailing in his 26-foot Columbia, "DESIRE," was well noted as a welcomed challenge for fellow racers. Somehow Ernie obtained or made a set of what are called "wind compasses." Set on opposite sides of his mast along the spreaders, each "device" had what looked like rotors that were on a sort of swivel system. Ernie used these aides to help him adjust his sails and course in races and he came in first place many times. Protests were never made. Fellow racers just enjoyed seeing Ernie race, and probably, silently, many appreciated this challenge to improve their racing skills.

In addition to his fine racing and sailing skills, Ernie was well appreciated and noted for his craftsmanship. From being a carpenter in the Navy

aboard “Vincennes” Ernie readily and often helped many members with a multitude of boat repairs and modifications.

Our “veteran” sailor became a sort of iconic role model as age took its toll but Ernie, despite needing to use a walker, still kept sailing with daughter/member Jan Ziobrowski until his final days.

19. BOB and JOYCE PETERS



A passion for sailing certainly takes root in many of us at an early age, and so it was with Bob Peters. Bob's love for the water, swimming and boats led him as a schoolboy to join the local Sea Scouts Ship # 39 on the lower Genesee River. Under the Scout leadership of E. Dow Van Dine, a GYC sailor, Bob fell in love with sailing and combined it with his interest and skills in wood carving, finally building many model ships over his lifetime, mostly small and large sailboats (one about 4 ft.!), model power boats and a model of the railroad swing bridge. As a GYC member since 1970, he was active sailing the 29-foot Ericson, “ORION,” he bought from our Bill Schirmer. He often loved to drop sails in good weather on the lake to go for a swim.

However, it is important to note that Bob's skills in metal and woodworking resulted in major improvements in existing docks and in the construction of many new docks. Always a gentleman, Bob's leadership and skills were most challenged and appreciated as he diligently served as Commodore during 1983 -84 when our new club

house was constructed—a challenging feat he led well!

In 2019 Bob Peters remains a great and valuable leader—sort of a distinguished “Founding Father” at crucial times. His legacy is certainly well represented and appreciated in our docks and beautiful club house!

A final note: Each year Bob and first mate Joyce combine their efforts to help GYC in a special way. As the Christmas season approaches, their good cheer is expressed in helping to decorate the clubhouse, providing a pianist for singing holiday music & bringing their special refreshments!!

20. THOMAS "TOM" BEACH



When Tom Beach joined the GYC in 1998 he was a recently retired schoolteacher seeking to have a lot of fun with his O'Day 25 “GOOD IDEA.” He took part in many races and did some cruising too.

However, he had a zest for adventure and greater challenges. So, in 1999 he thought, “why not sail from Florida to the Bahamas? This boat can do it.” So obsessed, he trailered his boat to Ft. Lauderdale and, with his brother, sailed across the powerful Gulf Stream with an informal fleet of others to Green Turtle Cay, Bahamas. There, safely anchored, he lived on board enjoying the fine weather, fishing, and diving. After two months, he sailed solo to Florida, then returned to GYC. Today,

sailing his C&C 29 Mark One, "FIRST TODAY," Tom enjoys a blend of racing and cruising. But his crossing the Gulf Stream remains a superb achievement and a great joy!

21. MIKE MEYERS and STEVIE MEYERS



Stevie Meyers with Elaine and Stu Carter 2002

Of all the many couples in GYC who have meant so much to our membership, certainly Mike and Stevie Meyers are quite outstanding. Mike was one of the first members to join and help organize the Genesee Yacht Club. In the late 1940's their story was featured in the local newspaper for their efforts to build a wooden 26 ft. Thunderbird sloop in their driveway while raising a family. After years of sailing that boat, Mike passed away. However, the spirit and zest for sailing and support for the Genesee Yacht Club continued. How?

It was truly Stevie (Stephanie) Meyers who was this unique inspiration. She long continued her activity and membership in the club taking part in many social or sailing events and lending a hand wherever and whenever she could. Stevie did this with a very sincere concern for each and all of the members. She was always smiling, optimistic, encouraging to everyone and eternally showing her pride and pleasure in being part of the GYC family. For many decades she shined as a great treasure of our club until the end. It is no wonder then, and a fitting tribute to her, that everyone called her “Grandma Sunshine.”

22. DONALD BARRETT



One of the most adventurous GYC sailors in recent memory, without a doubt, was Don Barrett.

Here was a very well-educated man who also was quite humble, soft spoken and seemingly rather shy. His love for sailing reached far and wide. Owning an Aquarius 23 he called “LITTLE DIPPER,” he sought to use his tiny craft to sail the famous Bermuda One – Two Race in 1977, 1979 and 1985.

Barrett was really intrepid and determined. Since his boat was just a little too small for entry in the race, he had to get special permission, add some size at the stern and then departed, only to face a near disaster. Just few miles offshore the rudder of the Aquarius fell off!

Fortunately for Don the seas were not rough, and he was rescued by a freighter. Somehow, he returned to shore, then, back in Rochester he had Shumway Marine add a new rudder and, yes, undeterred, he returned to Newport the following year to enter the race again! This was the Bermuda One – Two race, to sail out solo, but the return sail permitted a crew, or 2, on the boats. However, our Don had an “orphan” streak to his personality, a sort of loner, and he could find no crew. Thus, bravely, Don sailed from Bermuda back to Newport, alone. Solo! This had to be the greatest solo distance sailing of anyone in the history (so far) of the Genesee Yacht Club!

23. JAN BAKKER---The "FLYING DUTCHMAN"



It is a shame that Jan Bakker retired so long ago because he was a most unique sailor. His personality was always so expressive with endless and very interesting conversations. That was in part to his high intellect and experiences during World War II in his native Netherlands. As a history teacher I had many interesting talks with Jan about the war and a wide variety of topics.

Jan was very meticulous about his CAPE DORY 30 (or 32?), the “HAWK” and enjoyed sailing it with his wife, Gloria, and their daughter. But his

greatest joy was yet to come.

One day at Marge's Lakeside Inn I overheard many men speaking German but soon found out they were Dutchmen from the Netherlands attending the U of R for a seminar. I met their leader, Captain Jens Vangooswilligen and invited him to my home, whereupon he gave me a handsome wooden plaque of The Loosten Coporatie – or association of harbor pilots from Rinmund (the Rhine River Mouth).

Quickly, I thought of Jan Bakker and I asked him if he would like to take the fellow countrymen for a sail. Jan was happy to oblige, and when I saw the day when several Dutchmen crammed the cockpit of the "HAWK" Jan was joyously ecstatic!! I, too, thrilled as I watched from the dock and saw the "HAWK," very low in the stern, swing gently out of its GYC dock and Jan rapidly speaking Dutch with great delight as his all-Dutch crew responded!

A fine time was enjoyed by all, sailing on beautiful Lake Ontario. Especially by Jan Bakker, the "Flying Dutchman"!

24. ELAINE and STUART "STU" CARTER



Although Stu Carter joined GYC in 1988 and soon acquired Phil Frank's Hunter 30, "Captain Hook and Tinkerbelle," Elaine Carter soon displayed

a far-exceeding passion for, and skill in, sailing. However, Elaine's love for sailing was soon to become the escape valve for championing leadership and participation for women in life.... and especially in sailing! Hence, Elaine began by recruiting all-women crews for GYC races; either GYC members, spouses or club friends. She truly relished the close ties and mutual friendships with GYC sailors like Tony Robak, Jeanne Heil, Mary Cannan, Thea Korbel and Carol Vallese. She boldly renamed her boat "Bote Hook."

Ever the crusader, this was not enough. Soon Elaine proposed and began the practice of GYC volunteer skippers offering free fun sails to novices from far and wide. By 2000, somehow the word got out and small groups of strangers —novices— would begin gathering Wednesdays after work at a gazebo, introductions made, and then everyone gets assigned to enjoy their first outing — on a GYC sailboat! Many have returned for several sails and some lessons, and some even have joined, adding to our membership! Recently, the "Newbies Night" program has led to GYC now offering 2 rental boats, "Maple Leaf" and "Silent Partner," further enhancing Elaine's great legacy to GYC and women.

Visiting Elaine, very ill with only a few days left to live, I asked her if there was anything I could do to help her, and with her usual stout determination she replied,

"Take care of my ladies!"

25. DOW VAN DINE



Advisor/Captain: Sea Scout Ship #39, Genesee River (ca. 1970's)

One of the finest and kindest persons I have ever known was Dow VanDine. Joining GYC in 1967 he was a very elderly, gracious and soft-spoken sailor who loved and tenderly cared for his wooden sloop, "PLUME." Just to talk to Dow as he caulked his boat, I recall how I was deeply touched by his warmth and kindness. His dinghy he named "Quill," to keep both vessels with a theme of old-fashioned writing with goose feathers. Sadly, he soon departed to spend his final days sailing from a new home on the Chesapeake Bay.

My loss, in a sense. A true "old salt" of the GYC.

26. Don Messina account of sailing in HURRICANE AGNES 1972

from USPS *ENSIGN* magazine

Eager for Adventure

"Sometimes a storm not only tests a sailor's skill and strength but his courage and faith as well."



Summer was half over and it seemed the thing to do—sail across Lake Ontario. After years of sailing a small boat around the shoreline of Rochester, New York, I finally purchased a cruising sailboat. My sleek 24-foot Seafarer sloop “ESPERANZA” looked eager for adventure upon open waters. I was restless. So why not sail across the lake?

As my friend Jack Degnan and I met dockside in the early Monday morning mist I kept asking myself, “Yeah, why not?” I had planned well: a good boat, the latest charts, an accurate compass and ample supplies. Moreover, Jack was an eager and experienced sailor. And the goal was alluring — arrival in Alexandria Bay for the riotous “Pirates' Weekend.” Yet while I trundled loads of goods from the dock and stowed them on board, I wondered. Excitement, worry and fear—they were running a triangular race in my stomach.

Somehow, the look in Rosie's eyes as she waited to see us off was too wistful for a girlfriend to have. “Here, Don,” she said softly as I loosened the dock lines. “Here's a little something for you and Jack,” as she passed a pail of homemade Italian cookies. “And this is for you....” It was a thin paper bag. I quickly tossed it below.

Rosie waved long and lovingly as we motored down the Genesee River until we lost sight of her. Beyond the Rochester piers stretched the gray water of Lake Ontario. We were off!

Although the weather forecast predicted rain, I figured it would be fine for a lake crossing by Tuesday or Wednesday. Today, at least, I could make it east to Sodus Bay, shadowing the lake's south shore. As Jack and I settled down to a routine of handling the boat, I quickly went below and I opened Rosie's gift. It was a large print of “Christ the Pilot.” I was thrilled to think Rosie remembered I wanted such a picture for the boat. Mounting it on the wall next to the dinette, I silently prayed, “Oh, Jesus, be my pilot and protector throughout this trip.”

Returning to the cockpit I began to feel better. Through the open cabin doorway, I could see the picture. I was glad now, but still uneasy. Why? “Maybe it's the weather,” I thought as raindrops dotted the decks, making Jack and me scurry for our foul weather gear. Within minutes a

steady downpour occurred, then calm, then rain again. But “ESPERANZA” continued eastward.

Near Sodus Bay Lighthouse by late afternoon, an ominous cloud developed to the southwest. Like a gigantic black snake, swiftly it rolled to the northwest. A line squall! In the silent, windless moments before it struck, I hastily furled the sails, closed the cabin and motored top speed toward Sodus.

Too late! Suddenly the boat rocked, and violent rains were unleashed. Thunder enveloped everything. A full-blown thunderstorm exploded. Blinding rains completely obliterated visibility of the lighthouse a mile away. The raindrops beat and splattered against my rain suit like machine gun bullets. Onward I motored, doggedly following the compass course. Minute later the storm abated. Then it passed. In the gray aftermath I guided “ESPERANZA” into Sodus and to the guest dock of the Sodus Bay Yacht Club.

That night, before turning in, I recollected the events of the day. With a strange and wondrous feeling, I vaguely remembered having read a Psalm when I first awoke—Psalm 29. What was it? I flipped through my pocket Bible. Finding Psalm 29 my eyes beheld the title: “A Song of the Thunderstorm.” I could hardly believe the word I read: “and the voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thundereth; the Lord is upon many waters....”

All through the night the wind moaned and howled eerily, and Tuesday dawned another gray day. However, Jack and I shoved off and sailed eastward to Oswego, still following the south shore of Lake Ontario. Finally, on Wednesday I decided to head north for open water, cross the lake and go to Henderson Harbor. The morning was sunny with only 50 percent chance of rain forecast.

As I lost sight of land, I noticed a gradual stiffening of the wind. Nearing the middle of the crossing, the sky became hazy, and the southwest wind began whipping up high following seas. Life vests were donned—then rain suits because of the spray. I dropped the mainsail and proceeded under jib sail alone.

It was near noon so I tried munching on some tuna fish from an open can and sipping a can of beer while steering. I spilled much of it, not realizing that that simple fare was almost to become my last supper. Incredibly the wave grew higher. In the troughs ESPERANZA was walled in the waves four to six feet high. Each wave threatened a swamping, so I closed the cabin completely.

As the wind increased and the work became harder, Jack groaned in his own brand of Gaelic, “Aye, be gora, be gora! What a day! Who forecast this blow!” He grinned and guffawed a bit. But it was half-hearted and the last of Jack's joviality I was to see that day.

With great eagerness I awaited the sight of land and was cheered when I saw the point appear which marked our entry into the mouth of the St. Lawrence, and hopefully sheltered waters. To the contrary, as “ESPERANZA” neared land the rollers grew to gigantic heights. Each thunderous wave passed under her with a deep throat rumbling. Then with the bow in a trough, each wave leaped upward, ahead of the boat, like a huge wild beast, eight to ten feet into the sky and spewed forth a hissing, frothy foam at the crest followed by a burst of green water. “Green water.....from the depths!” I shouted. “It's really churning, Jack! I thought this only happens on the ocean!”

Near 2 PM, “ESPERANZA” entered a channel with land to the right and islands to the left. Yet, I was disturbed at how far the islands seemed and how much distance remained. Suddenly, a hard gust of wind hit the boat and laid it almost on its side. “Let go! Let out!” I screamed at Jack, “Let out the jib!” Jack struggled to furl the jib and to my dismay I realized that instead of shelter, the channel of the St. Lawrence was acting as a funnel for the wind and increasing its velocity.

Everywhere, the waters were scarred with “cat paw” streaks marking the wind's fury. Viciously the wind whipped through the rigging with a hateful, horrifying shriek.

Then one gust was so violent I screamed, “Let 'er go! Let the whole sail fly.....were going over!” To my utter amazement, as the sail was fluttering downwind, completely unchecked, the wind friction was

enough to pull the bow over! "It's got to go, Jack! That sail's got to come down." Arduously the sail was dropped and lashed.

Then, for an hour, "ESPERANZA" labored under motor until I sighted Henderson Bay. For miles to the right stretched the reefs and tiny islands that mark the open end of the bay. Fearing swamping by the high seas, I dared not open the cabin to find where the charts marked the one and only safe entry to Henderson. At that moment I thought of Christ the Pilot, of the way he looked in the picture inside the cabin. "Oh, Jesus," I silently prayed, "how do I get into that bay? Where's the safe channel? Show me the way. Please dear Jesus, guide me inside to shelter!"

After a half hour of desperation, my prayers were answered. A large powerboat appeared from the left two mile away. Surging wildly through the surf, it crossed my bow and entered Henderson. "Thank you, Jesus!" I shouted as I headed toward the entrance. Passing a black channel marker my heart leaped – but not for long. Instead of finding protected waters, I faced a huge bay boiling savagely in the storm, churning with ten-foot waves!

Under full throttle I tried to motor south directly into the waves toward Henderson Harbor, but to no avail. The storm's fury was indomitable, and the boat was mercilessly tossed back, pounded back by each wave! Desperately I instructed Jack to ignite a smoke flare. Maybe someone would see---would help. Maybe..... Then I almost fainted from despair. The smoke flare only fizzled. A dud! Aimlessly I motored with the waves, trying to head for a shore, obviously taking too heavy a pounding for any boat to anchor or tie up safely. Silently I prayed.

There seemed only one thing left to do. "Jack..... the chart in cabin...." I stammered. Carefully, Jack opened the cabin and brought me a chart as I steered. Miraculously no wave swamped "ESPERANZA." While Jack closed the cabin, I shouted, "There! I've found it! We can go north with the waves to Sackets Harbor! Oh, thank you, Lord!"

But deliverance was not yet at hand. Sometime later, as "ESPERANZA" was about to pass through a channel between the mainland and an

island, I suddenly saw a lighthouse on the tip of the island, or so I noticed on the chart. "Jack, it must be there's high water covering that neck of land. We've got to go around the lighthouse! Around it! We were heading for submerged land---shoals---in that channel."

Just as I swung 90 degrees to go about the island, a large wave hit and knocked the boat way over. Before she fully recovered, a gigantic 12- or 14-footer loomed like a sea monster. I tried to scream but was paralyzed with fear. Sadistically the wave crashed completely over the boat!

Slowly, ESPERANZA surfaced like a doomed submarine. Thoroughly drenched, I sat, stunned, up to the waist in water! "ESPERANZA" had swamped! "Don! You OK? I lost sight of you!" blurted Jack. "Only water...."

For a moment the whining outboard, the screeching wind and roaring waves could not be heard. Dazed, I only sensed the gurgling of water slowly emptying from the self-bailing cockpit. Then—CRASH! I was jolted by an agonizing shock. Ba—ba—boooooom! "Ahhhh! A reef! A reef, Jack!" I screamed as the boat sank into a trough and the steel centerboard clanged on rocks below. Jack's black eyes flashed wildly. "What's happening?" he barked, his face dripping with spray. Cra—ga—garooooom! A second, then a third time on that murderous reef!

Silently, I prayed, "OK, Lord. If this is it, have mercy on me; take me...." as the boat edged closer to shore where huge rocks close on shore waited to smash the boat and green spewing monster waves would soon drag us under. Suddenly another huge wave miraculously lifted "ESPERANZA" of the reef, and gradually the motor pushed us clear of the island, miraculously still running while mainly submerged!!

Several minutes later, I headed into Sackets Harbor. It was 5:30 PM. After nine hours, shelter at last. After I motored in and tied up, I fell on my knees on the dock in giving thanks. Surely it couldn't be over. Was I dead or alive? Faintly I heard someone say that the winds were reaching 50 miles per hour.

Quickly I opened the cabin, reached for my Bible and prayed, “Dear God, what does this all mean?” I opened at random and instantly my eyes looked upon the middle of Acts 27---St. Paul's stormy sea voyage!

That evening I telephoned home. Since Rosie was visiting my mother, I talked to her, mentioned what had occurred and requested prayers from her and our prayer group for a safe return. It wasn't difficult to forgo the rest of the trip. How could “Pirates' Weekend” possibly compare to what had happened? Thus began a leisurely 2-day sail back to Rochester. Day one to Frenchman's Cove. Day two proved to be a miracle. Awakening at 6 AM a very unusual wind from the NE blew steadily; so instead of heading to Sodus, we gladly sailed diagonally across the lake to Rochester, nonstop, arriving by 9 PM.

Following a day of rest at home, I took “ESPERANZA” out alone and motored to a secluded basin up the Genesee River. There I anchored near a wild shore with marsh reeds rustling in the balmy breeze. Lovingly the sun warmed and cheered my solitude.

A profound sense of contentment filled me. As I did some chores I meditated upon my voyage. Pausing for a rest I gazed upon the picture of “Christ the Pilot.”

“Thank you, dear Lord,” I murmured.

27. 'THE BLESSING OF THE FLEET—and THE FEAST OF ST. ANTHONY

Probably the warmest and most enduring memory of all of my decades of sailing on Lake Ontario is the special event known as the Blessing of the Fleet. It all began with a bunch of mainly Italian immigrant, or Italo-American guys, mostly sailors, who attended Holy Cross Church in the Charlotte neighborhood. They are rumored to have said, “We gotta do more...have more fun with our boats...we really need to have the fleet blessed.”

So, every June 13th on the Feast of St. Anthony, for which all Italians love and respect, and for which Holy Cross Church has yearly celebrations at the outdoor shrine of St. Anthony, it was decided to arrange for the blessing of the fleet on that special day. This occurred sometime in the 1980's.

Needing a priest to do the blessing, amiable, affable Father Thomas Wheeland, pastor of Holy Cross Church was approached, and he readily accepted in true Irish zest! Now this was to be for all boats and boaters. Thus, the organizing guys got very busy announcing by word and brochures to all the yacht clubs, private boat owners, etc. along the lower Genesee River.

Well, the atmosphere in anticipation of the event grew almost to a frenzy on the day of the blessing. That evening of June 13th was blessed with clear skies, calm winds and warm breezes. I invited a girl friend of mine and another couple who boarded "ESPERANZA" around 7 pm, loading the boat with a huge amount of Kentucky Fried Chicken and bottles of champagne nicely kept on ice in coolers. I got out my Swedish folding anchor, assembled it with chain and rode attached, all set to cast it over the side. So, we were all set to depart.

By 8:30 PM or so, I motored out of my dock to join a long line, or lines, of all kinds of boats – motor boats and sailing craft – all headed slowly north down the Genesee River. Gradually the lines formed into one line down by the Port Authority. There, standing majestically in all his religious robes on the edge of the deck of a large cabin cruiser, anchored mid-stream, was Father Wheeland. As each boat moved closely – port side to the starboard of the cruiser – Father Wheeland cheerfully said some words as he sprinkled holy water with a religious wand onto each passing boat. As "ESPERANZA'S" turn came next, I felt so small next to that huge cruiser, but as the holy water touched the deck, I said a silent prayer of thanksgiving.

Now looking ahead toward the mouth of the river, I was amazed at the great spectacle of so many boats with their lights on. Looking to the west I was impressed with the entire Charlotte pier crawling with many men setting flairs all along the entire length of that pier! Most impressive, about halfway along the pier was a roughly 5 x 7-foot

framed image of St. Anthony which was already set afire – a most memorable moment for me!

Gradually the entire flotilla of boats turned right around the Summerville Pier, everyone crowding the lee shore against the moderate west wind to anchor all along the pier's length. Very close to the other boats, we dropped anchor and then the fun began in earnest!

As the evening turned darker, we quickly opened the containers of fried chicken and really feasted on them. All was quickly topped off with bottles of chilled champagne! The effects were soon in coming as people shouted, "More wine! Yeah, more wine!"

Then it happened: KAA---BOOOOOM! The fireworks began! All along the Charlotte Pier the fireworks were being set off along the length of the pier!! Almost all were aerial flares which flew high up in the sky and arced over the river very close to our boats. Their colors and different shapes were thrilling to experience! All of this lasted about 30 to 40 minutes or more.

This lavish spectacle, enjoyed fully with good friends aboard my boat – foods, champagne, shouts of joy and enjoying the spectacular fireworks – all were truly most memorable to me, personally. The spirit of such exuberance continued the following year – a second Blessing of the Fleet on St. Anthony's Day! Sadly that was the last we have seen of such a spectacular boating event in this area.

Cherishing the wonderful memories is all I have now. It is up to future leaders to dare to try this again!

Amen and sincerely, Donald Messina, "ESPERANZA" 1972+++



1940's - Original Clubhouse and Lightnings. Note the old train bridge and gas pumps.

