

Foxy's Wooden Boat Regatta

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Living aboard a sailboat in the Caribbean conjures a peaceful scene of an anchorage with clear turquoise water and a beach lined by palm trees. Living aboard MARA at the St. Thomas seaplane base was far from idyllic. It was noisy and exciting. Our predawn wake-up call came from the roar of Pratt & Whitney engines as the mechanics prepared the Goose fleet to fly for the day. I remember



Dave saying, “Who else has a Pratt & Whitney alarm clock?” Laughing, I said, “The rest of Charlotte Amalie!”

For me the advantage of being next to the ramp was that Dave could come get me to fly with him if he was scheduled to go on a training flight, a maintenance flight check, or if his passenger load was light. Captain

Blair was training Dave to fly the Sandringham (a 4-engine, 45 passenger flying boat) that he planned to fly to Ireland for a summer of “flight-seeing tours.” I always went with them and eagerly awaited the trip to Ireland. But that dream never came true. 1978 became a nightmare.

Early in April we returned from a month of sailing in the British Virgin Islands. When the girls in the office handed me phone messages from Richard Kelley in Honolulu. I was puzzled. Richard was the husband of my best friend, Jane. When I got him on the phone I learned that Jane became ill while judging an aerobatic competition in Arizona. She was in a coma in a Tucson hospital and Richard wanted me to stay with their five children so he could stay in Tucson.

Dave made arrangements for me to fly to Honolulu. The next day I packed my suitcase while I waited for Dave to return from his April 5th flight schedule. In the late afternoon I went to the Goose Grill for coffee and to watch for Dave’s return. I kept looking at my watch, wondering why the plane was returning so late. A ticket agent from the office came and said Noreen Gillies, who was in charge of the St. Thomas ticketing office, wanted to see me. Noreen told me that Dave’s plane had not arrived in St. Croix after departing St. John. Search parties, both

planes and boats, were looking for him. I imagined Dave standing on the wing of the Goose waving his white shirt for attention.

A group of us gathered in Ron Gillies' large office above the maintenance building listening to radio transmissions from the search parties, now hampered by darkness. By a miracle, a small boat managed to locate and pick up the passengers from the plane. When they said they were taking them to the St. Thomas hospital, I wanted to go talk to them, but Ron insisted that I stay there.

Linda Turner, who had the office next to Ron's, phoned Gini, my sister in Colorado Springs, and arranged for her to come stay with me aboard MARA. Days passed with no sign of the plane or the pilots, and the search was finally called off.

Captain Blair and Ron Gillies arranged for a memorial service for Dave at the St. Thomas and St. Croix seaplane ramps. Afterwards, Bob Rambo (Dave's good friend) flew Gini and me over the flightpath that Dave's plane would have taken. Gini and I had made plumeria leis with flowers gathered from plumeria trees at Bluebeard's Castle, assisted by the owner. Bob had me toss them over the water in the area where he thought Dave's plane would have gone down.

The next day Gini returned to Colorado Springs, and I left for Honolulu. Jane passed away in the Tucson hospital just two weeks following Dave's accident. I planned to stay until after Jane's funeral and burial at sea. Then I decided I would stay forever after receiving an offer to teach at Punahou, the private school the Kelley children attended.

One day Captain Blair phoned to give me an update on replacing the Goose with the Mallards and asked if I still planned to return to fly as a co-pilot. Impulsively, I answered "yes".

Moving back aboard MARA, I realized I couldn't remain on the boat by myself in the dark and isolated area behind the maintenance building. I got a temporary slip at Avery's Boathouse nearby and started searching for a small

apartment. I quickly learned that even a small apartment in St. Thomas cost more each month than I would earn as a co-pilot.

Linda Turner, always thoughtful and resolute, said she would arrange for me to get the slip next to her boat at Yacht Haven where they had a security guard at the gate and good lighting. It was a great solution. I loved my new “neighborhood” on “A” dock. Several of us went to the Bridge Lounge (called “bilge” lounge by the boaters) for coffee and breakfast early every morning. Linda and I called them the “motley crew” because of all our differences. But we all loved sailing.



Bruce and Jean Chadwick were 15 years older than me. They lived aboard a beautiful schooner with a green hull and traditional tanbark sails. They had spent four years building their boat in Traverse City, Michigan. Two of their daughters, Holly and Heather, were with them. The schooner was named “Charlotte Jean” after Jean Chadwick and they had done extensive cruising, including sailing to Europe.

John and Carol Thompson, about my age, had a 38-foot Shannon ketch. After retiring from the Air Force, John was fulfilling his dream of sailing the Caribbean. Carol, unfortunately, was prone to seasickness. I admired her for being such a devoted wife. We all loved hearing her sing sea shanties when we went for sundowners on their boat and were soon singing along to such tunes as “Drunken Sailor,” and “Blow the Man Down.” The chorus of “The Sloop John B” certainly applied to Carol: “ Hoist up the John B's sails

See how the main sails set
Call for the captain ashore
Let me go home (*Let me go home*)
Let me go home (*I want to go home*)
I wanna go home (*Why don't you let me go home?*)
Well, I feel so break up
I wanna go home (*I want to go home*)”

David Haig, who was 12 years younger than me, owned a beautiful cutter rigged Westsail 32, and Cindy, his girlfriend, was with him. I had always wanted a Westsail 32 and had gone several times to the boatyard where they were built in Costa Mesa, CA. They were a good cruising boat, but slow due to their heavy construction. Some people jokingly called them the “Wetsnail.” Dave had named his boat Childe Harold, after a poem by Lord Byron. I think the poem reflected Dave’s personality.



Linda Turner, the youngest of the “motley crew” worked for Antilles Air Boats while her husband, Bill, was away with the merchant marine. She used her motor bike to commute between Yacht Haven and the seaplane ramp.

One weekend we were all invited to a party in the sail loft of Manfred Dittrich on Hassel Island in Charlotte Amalie harbor. One of the guests was Les Anderson, a local artist who Manfred helped build a beautiful 35-foot wooden cowhorn schooner, Penelope. His boat was as fast as it was beautiful and most of the conversation was about his plans to race in the upcoming Foxy’s Wooden Boat Regatta on Jost van Dyke, in the British Virgin Islands. Everyone was eager to be there to cheer Les on.

Jost van Dyke is the smallest of the four main islands in the BVI. It is just three-square miles and at this time had fewer than 100 residents. There were no roads that I recall. The big draw for boaters was Great Harbor where they could clear customs and immigration. Foxy Callwood’s Tamarind bar (a beach shack in the shade of a Tamarind tree) was a popular place for lunch or dinner.





Foxy loved to visit with his guests and entertain them with his guitar and calypso songs. On Friday nights they hosted a popular barbeque. But “the main event” was Foxy’s Wooden Boat Regatta on the Labor Day holiday.

I listened with envy at breakfast the next morning as my friends planned an “armada” to attend the event. I had not been to the British Virgin Islands since Dave I were there. When someone asked if I wanted to go with them, I was jumping with joy!



We were off to the races! An early departure was planned so that we could enjoy some favorite anchorages on the way and still arrive at Jost van Dyke early enough to find good places to anchor prior to Foxy’s Wooden Boat Regatta on Labor Day weekend.

We left St. Thomas after lunch and planned to spend our first night at Christmas Cove on the west side of Great St. James Island. Both Great St. James and Little St. James are privately owned, so boaters can’t go ashore. However it is still a popular anchorage because of the excellent snorkeling and diving and proximity to the east end of St. Thomas. We could see some of the buildings on the islands, but I got an even better view flying the seaplanes over them. I never knew who they belonged to.

I still do not know who owned the islands at that time. They became a big news item in 2005 when the owner was identified as Jeffery Epstein, the billionaire financier convicted as a child-sex offender. He committed suicide soon after being sent to prison, and both islands were listed for sale for \$125 million dollars. The money was to be used for legal expenses and payments to over 100 women who claimed to be his victims.



Everyone agreed to Carol's request to make Cinnamon Bay Campground, part of the Virgin Islands National Park, our next anchorage. It offered many activities ashore including nature trails, a small grocery store, cafeteria, and park ranger talks around a campfire in the evening. It was also a beautiful setting with good snorkeling. The island's open-air safari bus made regular stops there, and we all wanted to take the bus to Mongoose Junction. On the outskirts of Cruz Bay, Mongoose Junction was a small shopping plaza with beautiful stone and mahogany architecture. We looked forward to lunch at an outdoor café and visiting the small shops where local artisans sold their unique work.

Cindy's birthday was the next day and Dave told her they would shop for her birthday gift after lunch. Much to our surprise, Cindy said "I don't want you to buy something for me. I want to sail Childe Harold from Cinnamon Bay to Jost van Dyke tomorrow without you aboard to issue commands. For once I want to be the Captain and Marijane can come with me as crew." Everyone was laughing except Dave. Reluctantly, he agreed.

After breakfast the next morning, Bruce Chadwick came over in his dinghy to transport Dave to Charlotte Jean. As soon as they were gone, Cindy and I got busy getting the anchor up and stowed away and raising the sails. As we got underway, I glanced back and saw that they were raising the anchor on Charlotte Jean and raising the sails. I told Cindy and she replied, "The race is on!"

When we were underway I went below to get cold drinks. We sat back and enjoyed the view, with frequent glances back to see if Charlotte Jean was gaining on us. I told Cindy that Bruce said Dave was an heir to Haig & Haig Scotch Whiskey and I didn't know if he was just joking. Cindy said she didn't know that much about Dave's father, but his mother was a descendant of the Damon family, the largest private landowner in the state of Hawaii, and Dave was under pressure

to return to Honolulu and work as a trustee for the Damon Trust. I could understand why he wouldn't want to leave his carefree life as a sailor.

We won! Childe Harold was anchored, and we were furling the sails when Charlotte Jean arrived. Many boats had already arrived and we were lucky to find a good spot to anchor where we would have a good view of the start and finish of the race.

The next morning, September 2nd, we gathered aboard the Charlotte Jean for coffee and passed around binoculars admiring the wooden boats coming in for the Labor Day race. A speedboat came alongside, and Bruce went over to see what they wanted. Bruce came back and said they wanted to talk to me. I didn't know the two men aboard, or actually anyone with a speedboat. When the owner of the boat introduced himself I remembered meeting him once when he and his attractive wife, the attorney general of the USVI, were on a flight from St. Thomas to San Juan.

He said they were listening to VHF radio transmissions and learned that Captain Blair had lost an engine on approach to St. Thomas and the plane had crashed. He said he could get me to Cruz Bay in time to catch the next seaplane flight to St. Thomas if I wanted to go. I realized there was nothing I could do to help, but I also knew I would not enjoy staying at Great Harbour worrying about the accident. Bruce helped me get off his boat and into the rear seat of the speedboat and we took off so fast I almost fell overboard.

It was the first time I had been on a speedboat, and I vowed to make it my last. The noise was dreadful as we crashed through the waves. I kept thinking about Captain Blair and his wife, Maureen O'Hara Blair. Maureen spent summers at her home in Ireland and I wondered who would phone her with the tragic news.

I breathed a sigh of relief when we entered Pillsbury Sound, and I could see Caneel Bay Plantation ahead. Suddenly I was smacked in the face with a flurry of money as it flew overboard into the waters of Pillsbury Sound. I yelled to alert the men up forward, but they couldn't hear me over the sound of the engines and the wind. Helplessly, I watched what must have been a fortune floating in our wake. When we arrived at the Cruz Bay dock there was a driver waiting to pick me up. Since they had not cleared in or out of customs, I was quickly dropped off. I wondered if they would see their money floating in the water on their return.

The passengers were already boarding when I arrived at the seaplane ramp. Ralph Prince, the ramp agent, motioned for me to hurry. As soon as I got off the Goose in St. Thomas, I dashed up the stairs to Ron Gilles' office above the maintenance building. Ron wasn't there, but Linda Turner was in her office next door.

Linda said the 10-passenger Goose couldn't accommodate all the Labor Day passengers, so Captain Blair went to the St. Croix maintenance building and insisted on taking a Goose that was 22 hours beyond scheduled inspection time to transport passengers between St. Croix and St. Thomas. As they approached St. Thomas, he lost the left engine and contacted the St. Thomas control tower to tell them he was going to make an emergency landing. Linda said that Charlie and 3 of the 10 passengers were killed. She did not know about the 7 surviving passengers. She thought Ron Gillies was going to call Maureen in Ireland.

I was in shock. In just 5 months the three aviators I admired the most had passed away. They were my friends and mentors. They had encouraged me and helped me achieve my goals in flying. Charlie Blair hired me to fly for Antilles Air Boats at a time when few women could find jobs flying. I was lucky to have them in my life!

