

THE BOATING YEARS



As near as I can remember my interest in boats began in the bathtub when I would play with toy boats and dream of sailing on the high seas. Later as I grew a little older I began making my own small boats carved out of balsa wood which I played with in a large washtub filled with water. The first one I made was powered by a small piece of camphor ice fastened to the bottom of the boat beneath the stern. The boat was about five inches long and the reaction of the water on the camphor ice caused a sort of boiling action which propelled the boat forward. It would go round and round in the tub until all the camphor was used up at which time I would attach another piece. Later I built some larger balsa boats, about ten inches long which were driven by either side paddle wheels or stern paddle wheels. The paddle wheels were driven by twisted rubber bands and they worked quite well.

My next efforts involved model sail boats that I made but could not use very often due to the lack of ponds or other suitable bodies of water in our neighborhood. I finally ended taking them down to Alamitos Bay in Long Beach and sailing them there during our summer vacations. I was about twelve years old at the time. The really big event, however, occurred in the mid 1930's when Pop came home one night with a used 2-1/2 HP Johnson outboard motor that he had found somewhere in Los Angeles. Pop spent about a week's

worth of evenings overhauling the motor and then one Saturday he filled a 50 gallon drum with water and clamped the motor to the rim, filled it with gas, pulled the starting cord and it roared, or rather putted, to life much to the excitement of Bud and myself. It was nice to have that motor but it was rather useless without a boat to put it on.

Herman Fingerly, a German immigrant lived across the street and became a good friend of the family. He was a master craftsman and retired pattern maker who had been head of the pattern shop at the C.F. Braun company in Alhambra. Herman offered to help us build a boat if we would supply the materials. Several days were spent with him as we designed the boat of our dreams, a 10 foot flat bottom row boat which we were going to build entirely with redwood. We set up our operations in the family garage and within two weeks during summer vacation we had a respectable example of a sea going craft.

Much to Herman's credit he merely acted as instructor and supervisor, insisting that Bud and I do all the work with the result that we not only had a pride of accomplishment but we also learned the basics of wood working which we used to advantage throughout our lives. We painted the boat white with green trim and named it "Ginita," a convolution of the names of our pet dachshund "Ginger" and our cat "Ninita." We used that boat for several years down at Alamitos Bay. During the winter storm of 1935, Second Street became flooded from curb to curb, overflowing onto the sidewalks and parkways.

Bud took the boat two blocks up stream and then floated down the street much to the amusement of the neighbors. I took a photo of him as he passed our house and it was printed on the front page of the Alhambra Post Advocate. A tribute to our fine workmanship and design, the "Ginita" was still afloat in the pond on Gardner Harris's ranch in Woodlake, California when we visited him last year. In the interim he had given the

bottom a coating of fiberglass. His kids played with the boat for years in the pond up there.

Due to its small size the boat would only accommodate two people and we let Pop know that we needed a bigger boat, so one Saturday he took us to the Hollywood Boat Company in LA where we found the boat of our dreams. It was a 14 foot all mahogany decked runabout built by the Indian Boat Works. The rear cockpit had a steering wheel and outboard motor well. The front cockpit had two sliding deck pieces that could be used to cover it up when not in use. Pop bought the boat for us and we towed it home on a trailer that came with it and set about giving it a new coat of varnish. We named it "Ginita II" and had many hours of pleasure driving it around the bay and also the LA Harbor.

Pop built a boat house next to the garage where we could keep it out of the weather when not in use. That boat house later became the garage for my first car, my Star Coupester. As Bud and my interests became involved in other things such as photography, cars and girls, we used the boat less and less and Pop finally sold it but we kept that old outboard motor and I took it with me when we moved to Puerto Rico where it was used to power the fishing boat we built in my shoe factory plant as I described earlier in this book.

Several years after Virginia and I were married I began thinking of boats again and the fun we had with the two Bud and I had. When Grandma Bahn died she left me an inheritance of \$400 and shortly after I saw an ad in the paper for a 12 foot Performer glass outboard for sale complete with trailer and motor. The asking price was \$500. Our children were now old enough to take boating with us so I talked Virginia into the idea of going over to see the boat. It was in good shape and had a 16 HP Evenrude motor. After a due amount of haggling with the seller we got the complete outfit for \$450 for which I used my inheritance plus \$50 of my own.

I painted the boat white with red trim and we named it the 'Flying Fish.' We had it for a number of years and had many fine times with it but as the kids grew older it got a bit crowded and I realized we needed something bigger.

Then one evening as I was driving past the Trojan Boat sales yard on Lakewood Boulevard I spotted something that caught my eye. It was a 21 foot Trojan cabin cruiser with two 30 HP Johnson outboard motors, had an enclosed head, a well laid out galley with forward bunks and a large after deck. Asking price was \$3,200. Again, I talked Virginia into looking at it and we made an offer of \$2,500 plus the "Flying Fish" in trade. Our offer was accepted and two weeks later I towed the "Flying Fish" to the Trojan Boat sales yard and returned home with the new big boat. It took up most of the driveway and was the envy of the neighborhood. I decided to repaint the inside and put a new coat of varnish on the mahogany deck, gunnels and rear seat in the back deck. As I began cleaning it out I found all sorts of goodies left by the previous owner. It had obviously been used as a party boat and I found two bottles of unopened Jack Daniels plus an assorted collection of unused condoms. There was also a camera, cooking utensils, dishes and life jackets, so I figured we had got a real bargain. We named our new boat the "Umgwadi" which caused a lot of people to ask what the name meant and I came up with all sorts of crazy meanings.

After several weeks of working nights and weekends I had the thing looking like new and it was time to try it out. I chose a trip to Catalina as a shakedown voyage. We launched the boat at the Pierpoint Landing in Long Beach and headed for Avalon. Needless to say the kids and I were excited and Virginia was apprehensive and became more so as we entered a fog bank after about 20 minutes from leaving shore. Using the compass and dead reckoning I held to a course that I hoped would lead us to Avalon. I did not say anything to Virginia and the kids, but felt we were hopelessly lost. I

told the kids I would give 20 cents to the first one to see the island and immediately had three pairs of eyes up front straining to see something in the fog. Suddenly, Harriet cried out, "Dad, what's that big building?" Sure enough right ahead of us was the Casino at Avalon and I became an instant hero with my family.

Later, we made many trips to the island while the boys, Rich and Jim rode up front shooting at basking sharks with their 22 rifles. At this time I was at Hughes Aircraft and was one of the founders of Hughes Aircraft Employees Boat Club. We took part in many events, such as predicted log races, harbor tours and accompanied the first outrigger canoe race from Catalina to Newport Beach. It was this boat that we used in the two crossings of the Sea of Cortez in 1956 and 1957. Those two crossings were well documented in Pacific Outdoor News and in Ray Cannon's Book "The Sea of Cortez" and would fill a whole chapter in this book.

In reviewing the Umgwadi Log Book I find that by September of 1961 we had logged 3,367.5 water miles, had spent 419 cruising hours and used 2,514 gallons of fuel. As so often happens in boater's lives, we began looking for something larger and in 1963 placed an order for a 28 foot Pearson Yacht powered by two 180 HP V8 Interceptor engines. The purchase price was \$12,500 but they gave us \$2,000 for the Umgwadi which they took in on trade. We placed the order in February and our boat was due to be delivered in July with Serial number 32. July came and went and no boat. This continued for several months more and we kept getting the run around, all sorts of excuses. When I threatened to cancel our order the truth came out. President Johnson had placed an order shortly after we did and he got priority. As a result he got our boat and we got the sister ship serial number 33 which arrived in November. This boat carried 120 gallons of fuel, had a 50 gallon fresh water tank and was extremely well equipped. It's cruise speed was 25 knots and I could pull five water skiers with it. We fitted it out with a sea

water circulating bait tank, an eight foot sabot dinghy with sail and small motor, and an electric anchor hoist.

While we had the Umgwadi we rented a slip at Cal Yacht in San Pedro to get the monster out of the driveway and to avoid trailering it every time we used it. Later we moved it to a slip in the Long Beach Marina near Alamitos Bay. The slip was bigger than we needed but we had been on a waiting list for a long time and took the larger slip when it became available. When we got the Pearson, which we named the "Caledonia", the slip size was perfect for the new boat.

We had a lot of fun with the Caledoni fishing for Yellowtail, Albacore and Marlin and taking friends and relatives for cruises. We made numerous trips to Cat Harbor at Catalina and every Easter vacation we cruised to Ensenada in Baja, California where we always stocked up the ship's stores with good liquor. As the kids grew older and followed other pursuits they gradually lost interest in boating and we began to realize that the boat was beginning to own us rather than the other way around. It required constant care and upkeep whether we used it or not. Virginia and I finally reached the painful decision that it was time to get rid of the heavy stone around our necks and we put the Caledonia on the market, eventually selling it in 1967 for \$7,500, a hell of a depreciation over a four year period! However, those boating years were something we would not have missed for love or money. We also learned the truth behind the saying that the two happiest days in a boat owner's life are the day he buys it and the day he sells it.

With the sale of the Caledonia I turned my interests back to flying.