

A Wonderful Reception for ELF

By: Carol Niemand

Though the proposed trip of ELF north to Mystic and points beyond, never fully materialized and proved a bit too ambitious for this summer, the reception she received along the way never failed to disappoint Captain and crew. All in all, her first excursion outside the Chesapeake Bay became a learning by immersion experience for all of us. Rick definitely knows what needs to be done for next year in order to sail with the “big boys” from July to October 2010.

For me, my 2-week stint on ELF quickly became the experience of a lifetime! In an overnight decision, when I was able to hop a train from Wilmington to Mystic, I decided to join Capt. Rick and Don Shaffer on June 29th. The third crewmember had just departed for home, after helping to bring the boat to Mystic for Wooden Boat Show. So, there was room for me, if you can call the rather Spartan accommodations – ROOM? My sojourn combined moments of ecstasy, boredom and mayhem. The whole adventure is definitely not for sissies, but was fabulous nonetheless.

Our ports-of-call included the following: Mystic Seaport, Sag Harbor, NY, Greenport Long Island, Branford, CT, Oyster Bay, LI, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Atlantic City, and Cape May. Several of the highlights, for me, of the trip from June 29th to July 13th are chronicled below.

- **Mystic Seaport – June 29th – 30th**

We had a double-moon reflection while at anchor over totally calm waters on my first evening there. The illusion that was created caused you to feel that ELF was suspended between the clouds (a.k.a. Peter Pan) over water. We had a serious storm on 6/.30 that dumped 7” of rain on Connecticut in 4 hours, taking “Amistad” and us off the water until 3:00PM. Everything in the dinghy was floating over the seat, but got to slog through the rain to watch the Wimbledon finals in the clubhouse of marina.

- **Sag Harbor, Long Island – July 1st -2nd**

We got a tour of a huge Yacht “America” at the Sag Harbor Yacht Club, by owner Ted Conklin and Capt. Frank Mikuletzky. They had seen ELF in Mystic and really appreciated her restoration. Rick and Don also accepted another cocktail invitation aboard another huge yacht “L’Alanta”, after the Captain’s boat boys stopped by to see ELF. These folks had great ideas for marketing too. I stayed on board to do my nails – oh well.

- **Greenport, Long Island – July 3rd**

We had a wonderful tour of Anders Boatyard – a very old restoration facility. We were all as fascinated by their work as they were by ELF. We anchored outside the town, but had nice visit ashore and of course, ice cream at every port – this one too!

- **Branford, CT – July 4th –5th**

We had to abandon our plans to make it to Port Jefferson, due to storm and wind conditions. Little did we know, at the time, when Rick suggested Branford on the Connecticut shore, that this stop would be so memorable. We went in to refuel at The Branford Yacht Club, with plans to duck out to a little cove and anchor for the night. We the folks saw ELF, they literally went wild for her, giving us free dockage and producing a steady stream of visitors until 5:00PM, when we finally got to eat lunch. I was taken shopping, and then we were invited by the Bacon’s for cocktails on their beautiful

trawler, “Dauntless”. We were invited to stay by Commodore Newsome, given free showers, food and even coffee – which we were about to run out of. I am not sure if it would have been worse to run out of coffee or booze, as we probably needed both to varying degrees.

- **Oyster Bay, Long Island – July 5th**

I found out on the way to Oyster Bay that the 125 year-old Seawanhaka Yacht Club was on the “bucket list” of fellow crewmember, Don Shaffer. Apparently, Seawanhaka even predates the New York Yacht Club. In that our guidebook indicated that “reciprocal privileges” were available, I decided to sneak a call to them on my cell phone from down below. I told the receptionist that I was a member of the Rock Hall Yacht Club, but it was not until I told her about ELF that we were truly given the royal welcome. We were greeted by their launch, given as free mooring, a tour, served cocktails on their veranda, and then invited to the “Salty Dog Dinner” that evening. Ironically, my membership to the RHYC gave us entrance to this incredible venue, but it was RLF that sealed the deal. As we feasted on an 8-entrée buffet on linen-covered tables on their tennis courts, no one seemed to know or care about the results of the Wimbledon men’s final, which had just ended in a record-breaking 5th set. Rick left Wooden Boat magazine and brochures for the Commodore. A burgee from the RHYC is also on its way to hang in their Great Room with probably 200 others.

- **Atlantic Highlands – July 6th-7th**

We left on the morning of July 6th at 4:00 AM, in an attempt to make Hell’s Gate on the flood tide. This was so great to see NYC, in all its glory, from the vantage point of ELF’s deck. Just incredible! We made it to Sandy Hook / Atlantic Highlands, only to find that they had NO reciprocal privileges with RHYC, so no showers at all. However, we did manage to re-provision and add some spirits at a much cheaper price than New York. Ice Cream too became a “must do” for all, even Rick. The reception changed too, when folks looked at ELF and said, “Hey, man, you have an old boat.” They truly did not fully appreciate Elf’s restoration and value, as we proceeded south.

- **Atlantic City – July 9th and 10th**

We came into Atlantic City at 1:05AM on the 9th, having followed the lights and skyline for some 20 miles after a grueling 17 hour day. We anchored off a wonderful marina, Kammerman’s, which turned out to almost be our home-away-from-home. The engine died, and after two days of trying, the bearer of bad news became a highly-respected marine engine mechanic who said, “I am doing you a favor; she cannot be fixed.” The weather and our inability to facilitate crew exchange in Atlantic City left us pushing ELF by dinghy down the coast to Cape May on the out-going tide. Don and I were glad and sad to leave ELF, but Rick had new and trusty crew to bring her back to Georgetown, through the C&D Canal.

- **Cape May – July 12th and 13th**

We awaited crew exchange, but high-fived each other as we successfully brought ELF into the Cape May Channel by dinghy. We celebrated at The Lobster House with drinks for all, a treat from Captain Rick. After a long walk in town to regain our land legs, Don and I departed for home.