

Charlie Frisbie and “Alotola”

The hungry thirties had been hard on Northwest boat builders, but by 1935 things were definitely on the move again. Blanchard Boat Yard had managed to keep their crew together by producing the popular 23 foot Knockabout. It became increasingly obvious that there was a market for a really capable sailing craft, one that not only had a fair turn of speed, but one that could accommodate 4 or 5 people for family cruising.

Young Ben Seaborn was working as an apprentice in the yard at the time and spend all his spare time sketching boats. From his father he had inherited a natural gift for the development of sweet lines hulls for sail craft of many types. One day, during the lunch hour when the crew was gathered, Norm Blanchard Sr. asked a straightforward question: “Why can’t we build a good looking family cruiser that will really sail?”

Ben took up that challenge and immediately went to his drafting board. in a matter of days, he came back with the plans for a sleek racer-cruiser. The boat that was to become “Tola” was born. Without delay, the lines were laid down and within a month she began to take shape. Then entered Charlie Frisbie, insurance salesman extraordinaire. He bought her on the spot.

She was christened “Tola”, and was destined under Frisbee’s drive to lead Pacific Northwest sailing into a new era. Over the next 5 years, “Tola” and Frisbie were inseparable. If anyone on the PIYA circuit had ideas of winning, “Tola” had to be beat first. During World War II “Tola” was sold as her skipper had enlisted in the Navy.

By wars end, Frisbie was a full-fledged captain. When he mustered out, he bought a 57 foot Alden Schooner, sailing her up to Seattle from California. He promptly christened her

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“Alotola” and she first appeared in the 1948 Swiftsure. The sweet Alden sheer of her gleaming black hull, offset by a truly romantic schooner rig made her an immediate favorite of photographers and fans alike.

By 1950, Frisbie got tired of being picturesque. He wanted to win races, and converted “Alotola” to a 7/8 rig sloop. With the new rig came new life.

“Alotola” was the first boat home in the 1950 Swiftsure. Former CCA member Garry Horder was one of the crew and exclaimed “every one of the crew was made up of Charlie’s cronies who had served in the Navy. There were commanders, captains and one admiral, and every one of them tried to run the ship! It was a circus, but one of the happiest trips I’ve ever made”.

Charlie Frisbie was very much a part of the yachting scene in Puget Sound. With his infectious accent, irresistible laugh, and great voice, he endeared himself to all he met. Buoyant and fun-loving, a master raconteur, gentleman, and a sailor’s sailor, he was a unique individual.

IN 1959, Charlie and his wife Betsy set out for San Francisco with the ultimate goal of sailing “Alotola” through Panama, and across the Atlantic for a year cruising in the Med. At the end of the voyage he sold “Alotola” in Greece, where she is still in wonderful shape and available for charter.

This is your Station Historian reminding you, that it’s easy to get buried in the past.....

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