

Trivia

Under the Bernheisel Family Stewardship 1958-1981

By David Bernheisel

In the Fall of 1957 my family lived in Washington, D.C. and the members were:

- My father, Frank, USAF Ret. born 1904, a student at GWU,
- My mother, Bertha. born 1911, working for GWU,
- My brother Franklin, born 1933, out of the Army and a student at GWU, and
- Myself David, born 1936, just out of the Navy and starting school at GWU.

The family had a Jet14 but decided it was time to get a bigger boat. The thought was that it should be something similar to the 36' Alden ketch on which we cruised Chesapeake Bay and which was our full-time home for 18 months in the late 1940s. The new boat search included all of Chesapeake Bay. At Georgetown, MD on a mooring in the Sassafras River we saw *Trivia* in the Spring of 1958. The fact that she was too big and too old to meet our criteria no longer mattered. *Trivia* would be our boat. She wore her age well and looked more sound than she actually was. For \$7500, *Trivia* was ours and we brought her to her new home at Eastport Marina on Back Creek in Eastport, adjacent to Annapolis, MD.

I know little of the previous owner. His name was Cole and he was probably about 50 at the time. He had owned the vessel only a few years, had two sons in their late teenage years and he owned a dry cleaning business in Wilmington, DE.

Despite the terrible consequences threatened by King Neptune, the family was never hesitant to change the name of a boat. While we were contemplating a new name for the new boat, we received a letter from Tom Rickenback. He urged us, as a previous owner and an aficionado of Herreshoff vessels in general, to maintain the name that she had always carried. I have forgotten all of his many points but it was enough to sway the decision; she would remain *Trivia*. I believe, it was Rickenback who told us she had been rigged to the 7/8 design by Philip Rhodes in the 1940s.

In our first five years of ownership, we found several major problems all of which resulted in serious leaking when she sailed hard. We diagnosed and corrected the problems one at a time and, with each correction, she leaked less. Despite the problems, *Trivia* sailed every season. Once through the corrections, *Trivia* sailed trouble free with only her annual hauling and constant attention to bright work and other maintenance tasks. At no time during the period of family ownership was she ever out of commission during the sailing season; Frank's motto was "don't decommission the ship". Our major corrective projects were:

- In the first year, we realized that there was serious rot in the mast pad and it's supporting floor timbers. The problem came from fresh water dripping from the ice chest on the port side forward of the head. We tore out the ice chest and took *Trivia* to Arnie Gay's yard on Spa Creek in Annapolis where he pulled the mast and replaced the floor timbers &

mast pad. In the early years, we used Arnie Gay for the annual hauling as he had one of the few marine railways in Annapolis deep enough to haul her.

- We had an on-going problem with rain water and sea spray leaking around the windows in the cabin trunk. Going after the worst first, we removed the window glass and found rot eating away at the interior of the cabin trunk's stringers. Like a dentist's procedure, we dug out the rot, filled the stringer and replaced the window glass in new bedding compound. One after another we went down the line of windows. The procedure would help for a while but, as the boat worked, the leaking resumed. A different but related problem was that we were getting water under the canvas that covered the deck. We struggled with the windows and the deck for a couple of years and finally concluded that the cabin trunk was too weak to provide the structural integrity that it was designed to add to the hull. The cabin trunk's problems led to working in the deck and the old canvas couldn't keep the water out. To solve this, we opted for a whole new cabin trunk and replaced the deck canvas with new fiberglass. Going for maximum strength, the sides were each made from single plank with smaller portholes replacing the windows. An interior stringer on each side tied in the deck beams. We wanted to keep *Trivia* as original as possible and were able to save and re-install the hatches and skylight. The new cabin trunk and glassed deck stopped the leaking deck and reduced the amount of seawater intrusion when we were sailing. The new cabin trunk was Frank's design and was built and installed under his supervision by the shop at the Eastport Marina.
- *Trivia* was still leaking more than she should when she sailed hard. The problem was diagnosed by the owner of Oxford Boat Works in Oxford, MD as broken keel bolts. He replaced some number of broken ones which reduced the leaking to a reasonable level for a vessel her age. Several had been broken for years and we theorized that the breaks occurred when she received the dent in the lead keel prior to our ownership.
- We had significant rot in the floor of the cockpit which had started to work up into the bulkheads. The fix was to take out the cockpit floor and cut off the bottom couple of inches of the bulkheading. A new floor was fabricated big enough to encompass the bulkheading and it was hung from above. The fix worked well and we never had a problem with the cockpit after that. Like the cabin trunk, this was Frank's design and the work was done at Eastport Marina under Frank's supervision.
- Not related to the vessel's integrity was the replacement of her mainsail. By the early 1970s the Fairclough main, which had been made in 1947 for Tom Rickenbackⁱ, was getting tired. It was nylon and had the old marking "% 16". A new main marked "H 580" was ordered from Jeckells-The Sailmakers of London which was heavier than the Fairclough. I always felt that the new main hurt her performance both in speed and her ability to point. Still, she was a fast boat and it was with that main that she won the Classic Yacht Regatta in 1982.

Despite the work to maintain *Trivia*, there was never any doubt that she was seaworthy. She was sailed all season every season and she was not babied. The Chesapeake is well known for its squalls and over the years *Trivia* handled many with 75 knots of wind and significant seas. She was the center of family activity during the GWU years and of Bertha and Frank's social life during their ownership.

Trivia's home port remained Eastport, MD from 1958-1966, other than the winter of 1964 when she was berthed in Washington, DC to facilitate access for doing winter maintenance. By 1965, the family was becoming disenchanted with the Annapolis area and what we felt was over crowding of boats. The search for a new home focused on the Patuxent River and soon became a search for a piece of waterfront property. Finding a property with sufficient water to handle *Trivia's* draft was a challenge but we succeeded with a lot on Cuckold Creek up the Patuxent River from Solomons Island on the south side of the river. A dock was constructed before the house and we came to call the property *Trivia's* Dock.

The maintenance of *Trivia* was moved to Zahniser's Yacht Yard in Solomons where Skip Zahniser personally caulked a problem seam, which again reduced leaking to a minimum. *Trivia's* Dock was her home port from 1966 until she went to Bristol in 1982. The new locale brought Bertha and Frank into a new sailing community, which in 1972 formed the Southern Maryland Sailing Association (SMSA). They were charter members and *Trivia* became the club flagship.

At *Trivia's* Dock the vessel was used primarily, as she was in Annapolis, for cruising on Chesapeake Bay, usually two weeks or less. Many cruises were to take part in the SMSA's scheduled cruise plans and some were family cruises. Exceptions to the Chesapeake Bay cruising were:

- Two winters in the late 1960s Frank took *Trivia* to Deal Island, MD where he lived aboard as he was teaching mathematics at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore,
- In the fall of 1972 a cruise to Florida to view the last Apollo moon shot was cut short near Morehead City, NC when a bridge on the ICW proved to be short of the stated 65' clearance (there were several similar bridges ahead), and
- In the summer of 1980 she circumnavigated the DELMARVA Peninsula with a group from the Southern Maryland Sailing Association. She had an all-male crew consisting of Frank, Franklin, Stuart, Michael and two 14 year olds. The full crew helped her win the handicap race to Windmill Point.

As the 1970s were coming to a close, the family was becoming more apprehensive about *Trivia's* size and Bertha and Frank's ability to sail her alone. Also, the level of annual maintenance required was an issue. This feeling was not shared by Frank whose deep attachment to *Trivia* on day one had intensified as the years passed. As an example, in conversation with friends Frank said, "You don't own a boat like *Trivia*, I am associated with her", my mother responded, "I own my half".

Bertha was clear about her concern about *Trivia's* size and the family had a serious conversation about selling her and down-sizing to a newer boat; it had to be less than 40 feet, LOA. However, no matter how we approached the subject, it was clear that she would not be listed for sale. That brought the conversation to museums. The Mariner's Museum in Newport News, VA expressed a strong interest in *Trivia* but, as we pursued the subject, we found out that their intent was to dismantle her and use the cabin as a display; this was totally unacceptable. Then, I'm not sure how it came about but contact was made with the Herreshoff Museum. The proposal by the Museum and Edward Fleming was for Edward Fleming to purchase the vessel, take her to Bristol

where she would sail for a couple of years. Then she would be decommissioned, donated to the museum with funds for restoration, and put in the museum on permanent display. The plan called for Trivia to be restored to original specifications, which would include recreating the original cabin trunk. This approach was one that, not only could Frank accept, he embraced it. Frank and Bertha became lifetime members of the Herreshoff Museum and attended many functions.





Trivia photographed in 1959 by Bernheisel family
cousin Bryan Williams off the Severn River near
Annapolis, Maryland.

