

Maritime Voices - Dick McCurdy Interview – June 2023

Dick McCurdy always just wanted to be on the water. He grew up in Port Townsend, WA, sailing and racing with friends. At the University of Washington he was captain of the sailing team. After finishing graduate school he bought the bare hull of a Cape George 36 sailboat, finished the boat himself with help from friends and sailed it around the world with a woman he met at the Town Tavern. He then had a ten-year stint on tug boats, working his way up from deckhand to captain. That experience allowed him to transition to becoming a Puget Sound pilot, a position he held for twenty-five years. He still cruises in a 32ft aluminum powerboat. As you might imagine he has a lot of stories! We talk about growing up in Port Townsend, circumnavigating in the 70's, running tug boats up to Alaska and down to California, what it is like being a pilot, sneaking onto a cruise ship to take a bath, facing down a young man with a machine gun in Egypt, sailing with a parrot, cruising the Red Sea, voyaging with a baby on board, and much more. I'm Jim Heumann – here's the interview.

Jim:

So, I'm here with Dick McCurdy, thank you for being here. I often start these with asking people sort of how they got to Port Townsend. Now, that's going to be an easy one for you, I think.

Dick:

Well, I don't know. I start out with the place is infested with them, basically. I mean, my dad's dad was born, and of course, my dad and I was.

Jim:

So, there's a lot of McCurdys around. Can you explain how you fit into the whole McCurdy clan?

Dick:

Well, let's just say that I am one of the original Port Townsend McCurdys, basically. Everybody came from the Isle of Butte, originally, in Scotland via North Ireland, and had a number of cousins and whatever that were driven from North Ireland due to religious persecution. My great granddad came around the Horn and settled here. He was actually on his way to Alaska, lost a bunch of money up there, tried to mine, and he came down and settled in with his cousin, Samuel, who was a doctor here.

So, Bill, William, he actually built the bell tower and did a lot of carpentry work in Port Townsend, and built a number of houses and whatever.

Jim:

That's your grandfather?

Dick:

Great-grandfather. Yeah. And then, his son, Winslow Morgan was my dad's dad. And his brother was Jim, James Griffith McCurdy, who was the author of "By Juan de Fuca's Strait" and "Indian Days and Neah Bay". And his son was H.W. McCurdy, my dad's first cousin. H.W. of Puget Sound Bridge and Dry Dock fame that built ... the Mercer Island original floating bridge.

Jim:

And that's what, the Maritime Center is sort of named after...

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Dick:

Yeah, that's his. He had commissioned... and he contributed to as well that beautiful leather-bound series, Maritime History at Puget Sound, and he was a maritime historian. Had the Blue Peter. I don't know if I showed you...

Jim:

I've seen a picture of that.

Dick:

Oh, yeah. They're out of the water a lot down here, It's really interesting. We also used to call it the Blue Pecker, of course. I don't know if you should cut that on the recording. But I mean, I was on it numerous times as a kid. His boys now... of course, H.W.'s gone. His son, Jim, is gone now as well. And Neil, I guess he's on the... he was on the board down at the Maritime Center. Anyway, yeah, we stayed in Port Townsend. H.W. moved to Seattle. Made his fortune back in the day when... I mean, hard work paid off, and he basically started as a rivet tosser and had a degree from MIT. He's a smart guy. But a rivet tosser in the shipyard there which he eventually owned. So, he was a self-made guy.

Jim:

But you were born in Port Townsend.

Dick:

Yeah.

Jim:

What year?

Dick:

1948. In the old wooden St. John's Hospital out there run by the nuns.

Jim:

Did you have a good childhood? Was it a good place to grow up?

Dick:

I would have to say that, back in those days, especially when PT had a population of about 4,500, after the Coast Guard left in the '50s... My dad ran the newspaper here. We lived up on Blaine Street, 636 Blaine. In the summer, I'd pull on a pair of shorts and a t-shirt and barely even put shoes on and run around. My mom, a great Montana girl, my mother, born and raised in Havre, but she could whistle and she'd whistle and I'd show up a few minutes later. I could hear it from blocks away. But it was a great place, sailing as well.

Jim:

So, you got on the water a lot when you were young?

Dick:

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My dad was... he never really was a boater. His father had a vessel, the Papoose that they used to... His father ran the newspaper as well but died quite young of an infection. He fell down in the woods picking blackberries, scratched his arm, killed him back in the days before antibiotics.

Jim:

That's crazy.

Dick:

I know. My dad was 15 at the time, and he went to the UW anyway. He was, more or less, looked after by Jim, who was my dad's father's brother, Jim McCurdy, James, the author. Yeah, it was a great place. The only real thing that drove the economy here in town was [the paper mill]... especially when you drive into town, the wind is blowing from the south, that's all... That's considered the smell of money because ... there were...almost a thousand people on one way or another employees out there, at least, peripherally. And of course, everybody else in town just supported that group.

Jim:

Sure.

Dick:

Port Townsend was still isolated. Two ferries to get to the big city. Smith Tower, the tallest building west of the Mississippi.

Jim:

What do you mean, two hour or two ferries to get to the big city?

Dick:

No bridge existed on Hood Canal at that point when I was a kid.

Both my folks were Huskies, and we used to go and they had season tickets to see all the Husky games. That was a big deal. We'd go in there. He had season tickets from 1947.

Jim:

So, I've been talking to a number of people that came here in the '70s and '80s and early '90s, and they were talking about the people coming in to work on boats and stuff. What was it like for you being born here, seeing people coming in? I think people say a lot of hippies came here. What was that-

Dick:

I was one of them.

Jim:

Were you?

Dick:

I mean, basically. Well, not really. I mean, I had an engineering degree, or was studying that, and so, I was a hippie, a long-haired kid with a slide rule hanging out of my pocket. Yeah. But interestingly

enough, when I went to school, when I actually was in higher education, sporadically did I come home, really. It was always... I didn't spend that much time around here. And then, after I graduated, I started building a boat. It started in Everett, originally.

My father used to mention that there was an alternate lifestyle community developing in Port Townsend, and there was a certain amount of conflict between the retiree community, which was also developing. And this quote, "hippie faction" it was one of these things where, then, when I got a little bit older...

Well, we moved the boat that I was working on from Everett to Port Townsend. In fact, it was one of the... Cape George... eventually got called the Cape George 36. In fact, Cecil Lange, I'd worked for him in the evenings, machining timber and whatever. I was working for Weyerhaeuser in the R&D lab in downtown Everett, and I worked for him in the evenings because I had this dream that I'd held since childhood of sailing to the South Pacific.

Jim:

Before we get to that, I definitely want to talk about that, but talk a little more about your racing. You raced a lot when you were in college and before that?

Dick:

Yeah. And I actually went out with Big Jim Daubenberger. As a little kid, James Otto Daubenberger II, Junior, was Daubie's dad. I think Daubie is about five, six months older than I am or something. We were friends as kids. And, yeah, I went out... But that was pre-adolescence and as a child. And then, my father bought an El Toro that I rode mostly around in Point Hudson, and then, started sailing that.

[Then we] had moved... I actually started sailing [more seriously] when... we lived in Spain for a couple of years when I was a kid. I became involved with a Snipe fleet, a competitive fleet in Palma, Mallorca, and did that and they'd be like 45 boats on the line. It was pretty crazy. Penguins, they sailed Penguins, which is what I sailed, and then, I crewed on a Snipe.

Anyway, when I came back here from Spain, I was 13, and immediately, got into the Sea Scouter [a dinghy designed for use by the Sea Scouts in Seattle] because Mark Welch, my oldest friend... so literally Mark and I were friends in the crib, and then, he had a Sea Scouter and Daubie had a Sea Scouter. And then, the first year I was back here, first summer, I ended up with a Sea Scouter. So, it was just kind of like, all day long, every day in the summer, we'd sail. Welch, Jim Roberts, who also, he was a teacher here, and he still lives here, is a good friend. And we'd just, down toward the mill, out toward Point Wilson, have a... Trios Topside Cafe, which is CJ's now. We'd have a burger there, maybe, if we didn't pack a lunch. And just... I mean, you're always racing... one design... laced on sail and aluminum tube Mest. But yeah, we were always luffing each other up, always, all that kind of thing.

Then I got into larger boat. I ended up got an international 14, and started sailing with the Seattle fleet, went to the University of Washington. I was on the sailing intercollegiate thing.

Jim:

Were you good? Did you win?

Dick:

Yeah, we did pretty well. We almost qualified for nationals one year. They had some great sailors from Canada, a woman, Louise Anstey, and I think she's still involved, was a University of Victoria, sailor. They beat us out just a couple of points. Anyway. Yeah, we did all right. We'd drive all over the place.

Oregon had a team, a bunch of Canadian teams, Western, we'd sail up on Lake Whatcom up there. All the teams supplied the boats, used the fleet that was involved with the sailing squad there. So you'd just... We'd drive a van. We'd had a van from the UW, and one of us would drive the team up there and we'd stay in people's houses and whatever ..., it was pretty informal.

Jim:

Okay. So you were doing this while you went to the University of Washington, and you've got a bachelor's and a master's in chemistry-related?

Dick:

Yeah. Sounds like you've done some homework or something.

Jim:

A little bit.

Dick:

Yeah, yeah. I did. When I was younger, I was involved with big boat sailing out of Seattle and ended up meeting some people that were headed... for the South Pacific. I was, credit-wise, a junior at the UW, and I actually considered dropping out and sailing the South Pacific. And I told my dad, and he told me, at that point, he said, if you finish up, get a bachelor's degree, and then, get an advanced degree, I will front you the money at no interest to buy or build the vessel that you can take to the South Pacific as long as I can join you at some stage or another.

And I ended up staying in school and he said, "I don't care what the degree is in". At that point, I'd switched over from a more business course to an engineering course, and ended up with a degree in carbohydrate... Well, wood and fiber sciences, like chemical engineering thing, specializing in wood products. And then, a master's in polyphenolic and carbohydrate chemistry, which is specific to the pulp and paper industry, because I'd worked as a summer kid out here.

Jim:

At the mill. Yeah.

Dick:

I slotted right in. Came out of the Bachelor of Science program and slotted right in. I worked for Weyerhaeuser for a year as I was building the boat.

Jim:

And your dad's secret idea was that you'd get these degrees and you'd kind of forget about this South Pacific thing?

Dick:

He knew..., honestly, all I ever wanted to do was go sailing. I was a lackluster student, really. My roommate, Randy Shuman, he and I kind of passed the captaincy of the UW team back and forth. Really, all I want to do is sail, really. But, obviously, that's not going to pay the bills. But it was just an insurance program, I guess, for me, meaning get the credentials under your hood, and then, who knows what's

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going to happen, you've got something to kick back on or whatever. And I never really used it. No education's ever wasted. Really. But I never really used it. I worked for Weyerhaeuser for a year in R&D, at the same time when I was building the boat. Then when I quit that job and moved the boat up here to PT and finished it up down at, what was Radden's down at Point Hudson.

Jim:

Okay, so this was a Cape George 36?

Dick:

Yeah. It wasn't called that at the time. It was just... Cecil called it the "African Sta". He was from New Zealand. Yeah, "African Sta". It was, "Ah, there's a sta". It was Tally Ho Major. Design was a William Atkin Tally Ho Major. He had had it altered, there was a boat in Seattle called the African Star, which was a Tally Ho. And Tally Ho Major was slightly different, but he had the Tally Ho Major designed, altered by Ed Monk Jr. for production of fiberglass, started building the hulls.

Jim:

Cecil did?

Dick:

Cecil did, yeah.

Jim:

Yeah. And did you get a hull, and then finish it?

Dick:

I bought the hull, but I wasn't a boat builder at that stage. I didn't have any real skills. I hired some people, kept it right next to his shop and hired people... I bought the hull with the bulkheads and stringers and all this kind of stuff, and then, hired people to help me organize the covering over and do some of the more complicated job. It's a wooden boat from the deck. It's a fiberglass hull, of course, but it's a wooden boat from the deck up.

Jim:

And Cecil was in Everett at that time?

Dick:

Yeah. Railway Avenue, Everett. And his son David, Brian, he started calling himself later, was also there building a boat for a guy, Larry Alexander, that was a big Port Orford cedar strip plank boat.

Jim:

So, you graduate from graduate school, you moved to Everett. You worked for Weyerhaeuser while you're working on the boat.

Dick:

Yeah.

Jim:

And then, you moved the boat here [to Port Townsend].

Dick:

Yeah.

Jim:

Did Cecil move here at the same time?

Dick:

My father helped Cecil find a piece of property. The one where the Cape George Boatyard place is now. Todd has the property out there. That's where the Cape George 36 thing began, more or less. Yeah, my dad found that place. And Cecil, of course, we had a relationship because I worked for Cecil. We had some other people, a guy named Bob Madden helped work on the interior. Jim Roberts, Robbie and I were basically partners in the project. We spent a lot of time, did a lot of the work. The two of us had space in the Radon boat shop, which is now of course, SEA Marine [in Point Hudson]. They moved that Navy building across, they brought that across from Whidbey Island, floated it up and moved it across the beach and placed it back there. The Navy building that's back there, the big wooden building that they have... back in the corner back there? Yeah, we had a little space in there, and had the boat sitting right in the corner of the dock right next to the travel lift.

Jim, Robbie's dad was the harbor master at Point Hudson. When I was a kid, I worked down there, mowing lawns and all this kind of stuff. Always been just a kid hanging around the docks. They still owe me money, too, by the way. I think they still owe me 50 bucks or something. It's changed hands. It was like, it was Point Hudson and it was run by Harley Horton. And then, Big Jim Roberts, Major Jim Roberts became the Harbor master down there.

And I was wharfinger and collected moorage. Yeah, all those days, too, those boats, they used to stack those. They didn't have the east, west finger piers back in those days. So, it was a much wider place, because it was two linear docks on either side. And so, you could sail. We'd sail all those Sea Scouters in the evening westerly inside the harbor, gusting like crazy. You'd be dipping the rail. And we'd go outside and come down from Fort Warden and pull the centerboard out and run right along the beach at high tide in the evenings, literally, dragging the rudder in the sand and stuff. It was such a great thing for kids like that. Daubie Lloyd Baldwin, another guy at that point.

Jim:

I just met him last weekend.

Dick:

Lloyd and Mark Welch, of course. And Mark's sister, Ann, Nora Bridges and Margot Nibble and...?

Jim:

So, how long did it take you to finish the boat?

Dick:

About three years, by the time it was actually said and done.

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Jim:

Were you working on it full time or...

Dick:

No. Well, tried to work on it as much as I could, but I had the job at Weyerhaeuser and...

Jim:

When you moved the boat here, were you still working for Weyerhaeuser?

Dick:

No I'd quit. In fact, it was still in Everett. We were still working on it in Everett when I bagged that job. And then, brought it up here and just put it in the corner up there and had a little band saw and a radial arm saw, basically.

Jim:

So, when did you take off for the South Pacific?

Dick:

Yeah, on July 3rd, 1977. Rob had decided that he had different priorities, and so, we ended up... I bought his part of the boat out and I ended up meeting a woman in the Town Tavern, a hitchhiker. Sort of... She started hanging around and I basically hired her to do some varnishing for me, because I was trying to get some projects done.

At that point, I didn't know exactly what was happening. I knew that I wanted to leave. And then, I asked her if she wanted to visit... She was going to hitchhike down to California to visit her sister, and I said, I'm headed down there anyway. I was going to go down there just alone, essentially. I'd figured I'd find somebody and some...

Jim:

Oh, you were going to single hand then?

Dick:

Yeah. She came on board, and we sailed down there and she was going to get off in San Francisco, going to get off in LA. She was going to get off in Tahiti, and she was going to get off in Fiji. I mean, she was like... And she finally did get off in Australia. Because I was going to work down there for a year. That was Penny. It's a long story.

Jim:

So, was she the only crew all the way to Australia?

Dick:

Yes. Well... Yes, that's right.

Jim:

And she didn't have any sailing experience?

Dick:

Not really.

Jim:

And so, how'd that go?

Dick:

I mean, it was a great boat, that Atkin design is a super boat. Originally called it the lumber yard, that was its nickname is... In its early days as the design. It was one of the transom stern Atkin designs. He did a lot of double ender things. It had long waterline and it had a big rig on it. That's the way to go, big... carry lots of sail, but shortened easily. Most of your sailing is in 15 knots or less.

Jim:

So, you head out down the coast, so we're talking navigating with the sextant, obviously, in the '70s. Did you know how to do that before you took off?

Dick:

I had an old radio that I'd take out to North Beach, and I would actually take sun sites on the beach at North Beach with a radio with WWV to be able to get my time, and I'd practice. My father bought a sextant in Hamburg, a Cassens and Plath sextant. I think he paid like 175 bucks for it or something like this. I've still got it sitting up... it sits up at the house. It's like an heirloom now.

Yeah, I practiced out there, but I really... I raced Swiftsure a lot. But that was the only ocean experience that I had. The navigation thing was an experiment, seeing how it was going to work out. Went off, just left off Cape Flattery and headed south.

Jim:

Did you go direct to San Francisco?

Dick:

Stopped at Bodega Bay, and basically, to lick wounds. We got beat up. I didn't realize, and I later, when I was working tugs on the coast, I began to... I mean, I realized it before that, but I experienced firsthand that California trades, that'll blow like crazy out of the north. Most of the time, when the weather's like it is now, and you get that pulse, the high pressure will come near the beach and you got thermal low inland, it got windy and we got our butts kicked.

And it was one of these deals where... I actually... Which was dumb, but I look back on it, I could have easily sailed under staysail alone down wind. The boat steered itself perfectly with that self-steering gear, but we hove-to, and were sweating through the night, waves coming on board, all this kind of thing. And finally, I said, to hell with it. We bore off in the morning, and then, went into Bodega Bay because I just wanted to kiss the ground, I guess.

Jim:

So, what were Penny's thoughts?

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Dick:

She was pretty tough. She got seasick usually the first couple of days of a passage, but she was tough.

Jim:

And you didn't get seasick?

Dick:

I mean, who knows? The next time I go out, I might get seasick, but I have never been seasick. Pretty much my life's been at sea. Luckily enough, so far so good.

Jim:

Okay. So you go to San Francisco. Penny doesn't get off the boat.

Dick:

Hung around there for a month.

Jim:

A month, okay. As an aside, my wife and I sailed from here to New Zealand, left in 2011, and sailed down. Our trip sounds a little like yours. We got hammered down there off the southern Oregon coast and...

Dick:

Yeah. It's like in Cape Mendocino.

Jim:

Spent a bunch of time in San Francisco, and then, down the coast. But anyway, so it sounds familiar, but...

Dick:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was beautiful. Crystal clear, blue sky, the white... fair size seas. Ten footers. Over following seas and plenty of wind. It was fun. I mean, you had to be careful with tugs coming north, because you'd wreck equipment coming up and pulling up against that stuff, got rough enough running it straight-up wind like that.

Jim:

Okay. And then where from San Francisco?

Dick:

Down the California coast. San Francisco, Monterey, anchored off the golf course down there...

Jim:

Pebble Beach.

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Dick:

Pebble Beach, exactly. And then Monterey and San Simeon, kind of milk run down the coast and just dock hopped around Los Angeles area for a while. And then went down to San Diego and loaded her up and took off for the Marquesas.

Jim:

Okay. So you left, you didn't go to Mexico then?

Dick:

No, didn't go to Mexico. Took the bus to Ensenada...

Jim:

How long was the passage to the Marquesas from San Diego?

Dick:

23 days. Okay. Yeah, 23 days. Had a lot of 21 to 23 day passages. It seemed those long jumps like that were always in that range, Transatlantic - 23, 26 from Acapulco to the Hawaiian Islands. But 30 from Diego Garcia before it was a navy base then, 30 with a pregnant woman. 30 days to Djibouti and it was hot, flying, glistening and no wind-

Jim:

Oh?

Dick:

For days and days, change of monsoon.

Jim:

So you hang out in the Marquesas for a while.

Dick:

Yeah.

Jim:

Where did you make landfall in the Marquesas?

Dick:

Taiohae. I went to...Nuku Hiva. Went to Taiohae Bay ... there was no other way to get to the Marquesas back in those days. I mean the people that were there were there on boats and there were some other cruising boats.

Jim:

But it was probably not very crowded back then.

Dick:

No.

Not at all. There might have been six or seven other boats that were... and we all kind of became friendly. And you know you're on a time scheme, as you know, you avoid the Western Pacific in the hurricane season... So you're on a time scheme moving through Tuamotus, we stopped one place. No real... No electronic navigation, so you're sweating.

Jim:

Oh yeah, that would be scary in the Tuamotus wouldn't it?

Dick:

Yeah. I had one of these... Remember the story of Donald Crowhurst and he had the locator, or the handheld hand bearing slant bar RDF that he had... he was an engineer and I had one of those and there was still the...

Jim:

This was picking up an AM radio station or something?

Dick:

Yeah, you could zero in on if a radio station existed that you had the frequency for. But they still had RDF beacons back in those days. They discontinued that. When was that there? Early 2000s. But yeah, they had them all over the place here. New Dungeness, Race Rocks, Point Wilson. Oh yeah, you could triangulate yourself, it was imprecise. But you're working with parallel rulers and this kind of thing on a chart you're... you're zeroing in on it, it had a hand bearing compass on the top, so could...

Jim:

And your passage from San Diego to the Marquesas. Was that good? Was it...

Dick:

It was.

Jim:

Any crazy weather?

Dick:

No, first major ocean crossing for me and obviously for her as well... We had kind of got roughed up actually a little bit south of the Doldrums, the weather was beautiful more or less coming off the California coast into the northeast trades. Just textbook exactly what we expected. You're pouring over pilot charts all the time. You can put your position on the pilot chart. It's like, "Okay, what can I expect?" And it's all statistics. But we got into the Doldrums and few thunderstorms and this kind of thing, and had an MD2B Volvo Penta engine, 25 horse power plant in there, two blade 15 inch prop, not really all that good for propulsion. 45 gallons of fuel and ran that for a few hours a day just to make little progress. And then ended up, the wind came in hard out of the south and we were hard on the wind.

Jim:

Out of the south?

Dick:

I know, yeah. I mean, sometimes, you take a look at the... like look at Predict Wind or one of these graphic presentation things now you can see how the trades... the southeast trades where they make the interface with ITZ and you've got this, sometimes it's in the south, it just happened to be right on the nose, 25, 30 knots.

Jim:

Oh.

Dick:

And I was like, "What in the hell is the deal with this?" And we struggled with that for a couple of days and then sure enough it began to come a little bit more easterly and we're hard on the wind on Port tack, and cracking off, cracking off. And it actually came astern as we approached the Marquesas because there was a cyclone down there that we had no idea about that was affecting the actual angle of the trades down there. We ran straight down wind into Taiohae or Nuku Hiva on the north part and made landfall with Nuku Hiva in the distance and just ran right down the east coast of it and around the corner. But the cyclone went away, dissipated.

Jim:

Okay, so you hang out in the Marquesas, you go to the Tuamotus, then you go to Tahiti.

Dick:

Yeah, yeah.

Jim:

Tahiti must have been an interesting place back then. Did you meet any of the other famous cruisers back in the day?

Dick:

No never did. I read Bernard Moitessier. And always wanted... I mean, Eric Hiscock was my hero. I was given a book when we lived in Spain. I was given a book by Eric Hiscock Around the World In Wanderer whatever it was. It wasn't Three, it was like the earlier one, and it kind of kindled the idea of sailing, doing ocean crossings in a small boat for me. But I never met any of those people. I know John Guzzwell now, but-

Jim:

Yeah, we know. John. Do you keep in touch with any of the people you met cruising back then?

Dick:

Yeah, guy from that we met on the California coast and spent time with in Tahiti. He is a rather elderly guy now in Vancouver, BC. I actually haven't communicated much in the last year with him, exchanged

some photographs. He wrote a book about... he went down, came north back from like Tahiti, sailed down Tahiti and then came north through the Hawaiian Islands. But they joined us in the French Canals for 10 days... Joined us, yeah, they came over and traveled with us through the canals in the central French Canals the second time. Did a lot of French Canal stuff.

Jim:

Just continuing on with that trip, so from Tahiti then, did you go to New Zealand? Or, straight to Australia?

Dick:

New Zealand. Went to Tahiti, Rarotonga, Tonga - stayed just in the Vava'u Group, Fiji, and moved around, and spent time in these places. We only had a week's visa in Rarotonga. But I showed up ill, I got something in Huahine. We took on ice from a fish packing place, and I think there was a little fish gurry mixed in with that ice, and I don't know what happened, but halfway to... in the six days it us took us to get to Rarotonga, halfway down there, boy I started to... man, I had the stomach that just wouldn't quit. I was on the head a fair amount. Showed up there - I had nothing inside me. I was like... but you got to hide it because, don't want to be told to move on.

Jim:

Right.

Dick:

If you bring in quote, "illness," and that was the day that you Q flag, and "request free pratique" and quarantine type thing. We went into Avatiu into the harbor there on the north end of Rarotonga, north side of Rarotonga. And we went in the afternoon and it took a long time for the health... or no, it was the agricultural person to show up and they kicked us back out, and I was like, "What?" Because they kicked us back out because the Rhinoceros Beetle flies at night. And so they didn't want us... They wanted us to be at least a mile offshore north of the island overnight in the dark. If we had Rhinoceros Beetle on board, you'd know it? But I mean it's just a formality, they do it all other ships. If they can't complete the process of health, the agriculture and of course immigration and whatever, then they run you out.

And I was like, "What?" So I'm ill as hell, but putting on a happy face. And anyway, we ran in the middle of the night, good range, two neon tubes, and right through the reef thundering on either side in the moonlight and ran in on this range, ballsy when I looked back on it, but almost desperado, yeah, anchored right in the middle of the little harbor. And then went alongside in the morning. I got a line up, didn't go alongside, just you drop a hook and then back in and you get a line row a line to the ballard on the quay... It was just a sheet pile harbor driven in essentially.

Jim:

So was Penny competent to run the boat basically at that point since you were sick? Or, were you still sort of captain then trying to do it all?

Dick:

Yeah, well I was just... The boat was sailing itself, I mean, that self-steering gear was extraordinary.

Jim:

What kind did you have?

Dick:

Had what was then called the Lyric Monitor it was designed, it was an Aries, a copy the Aries. And you can still see... monitors are all over the place now, but we were number 24, serial number of that, it was designed by Gene Merwin and his son-in-law in LA. Northridge, California and Peter Lyric. Lyric Monitor, it really hasn't changed much.

Jim:

Yeah.

Dick:

I mean, it's still pretty much the same. They refined some of the bearing systems, but otherwise, gee, it's like bulletproof, and very powerful, Tiller steering too. That boat was a simple, straightforward, low cabin line, built for two people to sail the tropics basically. Originally it was Robert and I were going to be... Kirk Douglas, John Wayne, swash buckling in the South Sea, girl in every port and all this kind of stuff? That's kind of evaporated..., that was the original plan.

Jim:

Okay.

Dick:

That boat was... It's a great boat. They're a great boat.

Jim:

So anyway, you get to New Zealand, spend some time there and then go to Australia, spend some time there.

Dick:

Yeah, spend some time. Penny left at that point. I worked... I took a job out of Mooloolaba, in the... north of Brisbane. I was actually originally in Coffs Harbor and I worked on a fish boat fishing for what they call Jew fish down there, I don't know why, but it was grouper. And with this guy, it was just the two of us on board his small boat and he had a pistol in his belt. And we had a davit on board, it was long lining, get that fish, just get its head out of the water and he'd put a bullet in his head before..., it'd take both of us to get that thing on... they're a heavy, thick fish. And anyway, I kind of did something to my back. And so I single handed up to Brisbane and went in to Royal Brisbane Hospital up there and ended up with physical therapy and stuff, and met some people, met a woman actually who was a physical therapist.

But anyway, I went up to Mooloolaba, I ended up getting a job with a fisheries outfit, was out of Cairns and then went, did a prawn trawling thing in the Gulf of Carpentaria for only a few weeks. And then ended up on another boat out of Cairns. My boat, "Active Life" was in in Mooloolaba, then I moved it by stages. Anyway, Penny sent me a letter and said she'd saved a whole bunch of money and if I wanted

her to come back down the money would be ours to... she worked up in Juno as a cocktail waitress and catering and all this kind of thing.

Jim:

And this was in the time after she left in Australia and you were doing all this work and everything.

Dick:

Yeah, right.

Jim:

You were still down there and you were writing letters to her, and she wants to come back.

Dick:

Sporadically. She did, said the only proviso is that we go up through the Mediterranean, which was not on the plan originally. I finished the thing out of Cairns and we sailed on, and she became pregnant.

Jim:

And then what?

Dick:

Emma was in utero. Emma was the name of the daughter who was born in Cyprus, and we sailed the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, and that whole section with her, we were in Indonesia, we arrived in Cyprus. Emma was born in March and we arrived in Cyprus in February.

Jim:

But where was she actually born?

Dick:

Larnaca, Cyprus. Yeah. Not on the boat, in a clinic there. Cesarean section.

Jim:

Oh really?

Dick:

Yeah. It's complicated. If she would've gotten into labor at sea probably would've died. I didn't realize this. I didn't obviously, I just didn't realize that... You're young and you're dumb. But she hung in there. She was ill, had the morning sickness thing and all that, was unhappy in the Indian Ocean. Certain places we spent, had a wonderful time in Indonesia. Had a great time in Keeling Cocos managed to talk our way into Diego Garcia to repair sails, we had a hand crank sewing machine. Penny was an extraordinary seamstress. She could... she actually made me a sport jacket on a hand crank sewing machine.

Jim:

Wow. But you weren't married at that point? Or?

Dick:

No, we weren't. We didn't get married until we made England, and Emma was... well, we were married in November and Emma was born in March. So she was about seven months old.

Jim:

You ended up going up through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

Dick:

Yeah. It was fascinating.

Jim:

What was that like back then?

Dick:

It was cool. I mean, it was weird. The Red Sea has a reputation for being a northerly all the time, which is not true. When the Northeast monsoon has kicked in its southerly clear up basically to Port Saeed. So half of the Red Sea, you ride a southerly up there and lots of places to go. There's coral reefs and this sort of thing. Ethiopia was unfriendly politically, but Sudan in contrary to way things are now, Sudan was friendly. So we didn't stop in Ethiopia legally. We did end up, stopped a couple of places, but there's nobody around at all really. But we came out of Djibouti and just rode that northerly north and ended up in... rode the southerly north and then ended up at Port Sudan, we started sailing up wind and we were a solid week sailing up wind and rode just basically all the way over to the Saudi Arabian side.

And then long starboard tack back out to the shipping lanes and then you tended to get lifted on port tack on the Saudi Arabian side. Came up one time, it was beautiful morning and you could just barely see the outline of the hills, Saudi Arabian Hills, and the land is low on the Red Sea and you've got this abducting phenomenon and you've got apparent rising and lowering of the horizon. So sights [for navigation] are not all that accurate. And anyway, so it was one of these deals where it seemed unnaturally calm as we were on port tack steaming along. It was blowing about 12 or 14, but seemed unnaturally calm.

So what I thought was maybe we were getting a little bit close, there was some reefs on the inside, wasn't sure exactly where we were. So I tacked onto starboard tack and anyway, we were sailing offshore and we came up on the line of reefs from the inside. We'd sailed up inside a spur the Sha'ab al Shareef spur. It's on the chart, but I didn't know exactly where we were. The Red Sea is a tough place and especially with just astro-navigation.

But the interesting thing, I mean, I blistered by hand standing on the halyard winch, standing aloft keeping watch after I noticed that we were inside the spur of reefs, but we never touched anything. If I hadn't seen, if I'd been down below, we would've sailed right through this gap, which is about probably as wide as from here to the breakwater, we would never have known it. We would've probably noticed that it got a little rougher outside. But you talk about it like... I was hanging in there with my hand on the lower, hugging the mast. We got a Khamsin in the north part of the Red Sea, Khamsin is a local... it's like when a front passes through, it's the kind of explosive northwesterly that you would get. Haboob is a southerly, and you get that along the Sudan East coast, it's hotter'n hell and dry.

And then the Khamsin lifts dust off the desert. We actually were in radio communication with vessels headed for the Suez Canal. And we had communicated with this oil rig supply boat that was a German crew group, and they told us that we were fairly close to the north end of the Red Sea at that point, and

find some shelter because we had a Khamsin coming. I don't think you want to be out here for that. You'll basically go nowhere. So we went in toward the place at the north end on the western side of the Gulf of Suez, just at the top end of the Red Sea, Tawila Island, Eric Hiscock had been in the same place. Rode that out. It was built up on the windward side of all the stays, just this fine like ice rhyme, this layer of dust that was half a centimeter thick on the leading edge of everything.

Jim:

We had a similar thing happen in Mexico when we got stuck in a northerner there and for five days. And just got beat up with dust and wind.

Dick:

Yeah. You're inside you've sealed everything, I mean, wet rags. It was almost like... it was like dust bowl, it was a that sort of fine, flowery mist, or the haze inside the boat, this dust inside, even though everything was closed up and rags stuffed in the dorades...

Jim:

Wow.

Dick:

Yeah, it was weird, it died off. And we had a nice sail up the Gulf of Suez and entered the canal. Port Saeed was a great place. Had Christmas of 1979 in Port Saeed.

Jim:

And is that Egypt?

Dick:

Yeah, Port Saeed it's just on the north end of the Suez Canal. So it's a little west of Alexandria and south. It's the northern entrance to the Suez Canal.

Jim:

And you hear a lot about, maybe not now, but well maybe now too, about bribes and things.

Dick:

Oh yeah, baksheesh.

Jim:

Was that pretty standard?

Dick:

Oh yeah, it lubricates the system. There's little kickbacks going all the time. You come out of a restaurant or something, it's like, "Hey Mister, you want taxi?"? And he said, "Yes. ..." and whistles down a taxi like that guy, a little baksheesh he'll pass the taxi cab driver will give the guy a couple of coins, or a couple of

cigarettes, or... cigarettes are currency, at least it was back then. It was a big deal. I mean, they demanded, they would basically, "Cigarette?" They didn't go the places unless you had cigarette.

We came in, it was after the Egyptian-Israeli conflict, and the Suez had been open for about maybe about a year at that point. But there was still... They were like, what we thought were like children riding bicycles around with submachine guns in the spring carrier on the back of the bike. It was weird. And we'd come out of the Port Saeed, Port Saeed Yacht Club, they closed the gates at eight o'clock at night, it was a barb wire surrounding the place. And there were four or five boats in there, we're backed up to the various quay, and German boat and some other boats. And anyway, we were going to go to the pyramids and we were going to go across the ferry that ran across to West Port Saeed on the other side of the Suez Canal. And it just fly back and forth on a shuttle basis, but they didn't open the gates.

We wanted to be able to catch the bus from West Port Saeed down to Cairo. But the gates of the yacht club didn't open up. And so this one guy who was the gardener, he says, "Oh, no problem, no problem. I show you." And he had this hole in the fence that he shoved aside this foliage, in his hedge thing. And we crawled through there. Penny was like, what? Seven months pregnant? Seven and a half. She was heavy with child at that point. And we crawled through there with another couple off another boat, and we sidled along this wall on a small ledge that went around and he says, "Oh, keep going, keep going. You'll be fine." And there was this young guy standing there with a machine gun pointed at us as we came around this corner, sidled along this wall and just dropped... would've dropped right down onto the pavement there and walked over to the ferry.

And here's this kid with this machine gun pointed right at me. I was in the lead and came around the corner and he says, "Don't worry, he won't shoot you. He won't shoot you." And anyway, so we got sidled along and he didn't shoot. I shoved the barrel of the gun to the side. He just had this bland look on his face, just this kind of expressionless look on his face, I just moved the gun onto the side and we walked right on through. Walked into the crowd and it was pretty strange.

Jim:

So you get on to Cyprus then, you get through the canal and have a child in Cyprus. How long do you spend there then?

Dick:

We were in Cyprus for basically about three months. Actually, I'd have to look back to figure out exactly. We left in early, we left the 6th of May. Emma was born on the 11th of March, and we left on the 6th of May and just went North to Turkey, went around the corner, didn't stop another place in Cyprus. Went around the North to Finike in Turkey, sailed overnight and I got very close to lightning strike that I thought we're being shelled. Actually, yeah. This lightning bolt cracked into the water about 50 yards ahead of us. And here we were. It's a solid morning as we're powering across this large bay at the entrance to Finike, and anyway, a geyser of water goes up. I actually thought we were under artillery fire, and then smelled the ozone, and realized [it was lightning]. I had one of these things that I'd constructed at the top of the mast, which I had no idea if it did any good or whatever, but it was one of these diffuser things with a bunch of series of points that supposedly diffuses the corona, the plasma. And so you're supposedly non-attractive, which I don't know if I believed or not. I dragged a big chunk of four hot copper cable that I would cable clip to the chain plates to the upper shroud.

Jim:

So let's just finish up the circumnavigation. So you almost get hit by lightning in Turkey. You survive that and then from there, where do you go?

Dick:

Moved along the South coast of Turkey. Went to coast Kastellorizo Greece, Rhodes, up through the Aegean. And very interesting, really fun, Tavernas. Having the baby too was ... I mean, we carried that baby in a canvas bag, seriously. People thought it was just amazing. We had this little baby on this boat and all these Greek women.? All the way through the whole trip, having that child on board softened some of the hardest faces that you'd see in immigration, people and whatever, clearing into various places and stuff. Then it's like ... you have a baby. You have a child. And she got turned into a little blonde girl by the time we got back here. She was two and a half years old. And she was just white blonde. [People were amazed], I mean, you know what it's like. Venezuela and places like that. Guys in leather they'd see this baby. They were just almost like...[it would] grease the skids.

Jim:

You end up going up to England and you get married there.

Dick:

Well, yeah. Went through the med and all out from Greece and across to Italy and up through the straits of Messina. And then, Sardinia, Majorca. Jim Roberts and Debbie, Robbie, my friend, joined us in Majorca and then we went up and to Sete and entered the Canal du Midi and took a month getting through the Canal du Midi between Sete and Bordeaux.

Jim:

Did you have to take the mast down?

Dick:

Pulled the mast down, set things up, set up a couple of trestles, and the boom gallows and a couple of supports and mast, 55 foot spar down on deck, and powered through the canal. And anyway, Bay of Biscay and various islands and whatever, Brittany Coast, various places along there. Really cool. I mean, really cool. Just a great experience. I've been back to some of those places on the land and it's different by all means.

Jim:

And were you still working along the way?

Dick:

I worked in Cyprus. Every place. Every place we hit, I'd have to try and figure out a way to turn a few coins. Penny came back down with a fair amount of money. She'd saved a fair amount of jack working up during the legislative session in Juneau. Then she came back down when she rejoined. And so we were more or less sailing on that. And then whatever... I could scrape bottoms in Cyprus. Dove for lost articles wherever I could. Usually people just give you bottles of liquor for that, which was welcome enough, and then, I mean, I worked in the UK too. Worked for the Maritime Trust there.

Jim:

You didn't have problems with work permits or stuff back then?

Dick:

What permit? Yeah, I mean, it's money under the table. Australia, they're happy. They know there's a lot of taxation on just like tax here and whatever, and they just pay you cash in hand. Australia was the same. Australia, Cyprus, England. Worked for the National Maritime Trust in the UK. 12 quid a day. And the quid was about \$2 and 50 cents back then too.

Jim:

Then you had to cross the Atlantic?

Dick:

Yep.

Jim:

Where do you end up when you get across?

Dick:

Came back through the French canals again, spent another two months coming back down through the central French canals. Down the Balearic Islands, out through Straits of Gibraltar, Tangier, Madeira, the Canaries, various places in the Canaries. [Then to] Antigua, straight across. It was 17 degrees north. You got the North Star just holding that at 17 degrees over the horizon. Yeah. Antigua, English harbor.

Jim:

How long was that passage?

Dick:

That one was 23 days as well. We had a bunch of nine-day passages too.

Jim:

And then, you head for the canal then from there? Or do you go around Cape Horn.

Dick:

Oh. Well, no, we didn't go around Cape Horn. I've always wanted to go. Pipe dream, will probably never be realized unless I do it on a cruise ship or some damn thing. But yeah, we went down the chain to Venezuela and along the coast to Venezuela, and then went out to the ABC Islands. Bonaire was an amazing place. Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire. And then the Dutch Antilles, there, and then to Port of Cologne at the entrance to the Panama Canal and transited the canal.

I was given the name of a guy who was a Panama Canal pilot down there, and we were sitting at Cristobal on the Atlantic side, and I could hear the canal pilots. And it had been a profession that had always been kind of a dim sort of pipe dreamy thing out in the distance. I'd always loved ships and all that kind of thing. I used to sneak aboard ships when I was a kid in Spain, sneak aboard the ships that'd call in at Palma. Oh yeah. And Penny and I would sneak aboard the cruise ships in Suva, Fiji, and go down to the double E deck down below and go into one of the bathrooms down there and get into the

bathtub and lie there. And of course we had nothing like that on the boat, obviously, and didn't have a shower even. And we'd lie, and then, we'd drink in the bars on the cruise ship, and then just walk back down the gangway.

Jim:

[Laughing] Really?

Dick:

I'd have a camera, put a collared shirt on, put a camera around my neck, and just walk on board. Yeah.

Jim:

And you never got caught? [laughing]

Dick:

No, never got caught. Yeah. We'd just get out of the tub. There was always towels and stuff around. Because a lot of the state rooms back in those days, the Fair Star, the Fair Sea were, I forget what, the Liberian flagships, but they sailed out of Australia, and Australian tourists would come to the Fiji on them and they'd be all go ashore. A lot of the less expensive state rooms would be ... they'd have no head. You'd literally had a head down the hall and a shower and bath area as well. And we just clicked the door and lie in the tub for 45 minutes.

Jim:

That's hilarious.

Dick:

Yeah, those are the days you're a kid too. I mean, we were kids really, when you look back on it. I mean, I run into people that are that age now, and I think, man, what a great time. But you've still got your challenges. It's not all fun and games. Money, for one, and you got to keep it together. You're maintaining the boat. You've always got projects going, trying to scare up bits and pieces. And it's not like you've gone to the moon. These things are available, but ...

Jim:

Yeah. You get through the canal and then do you go to Hawaii and then back to here?

Dick:

Yeah. Sailed up to Costa Rica, Panamanian coast, which was really interesting. Costa Rica was beautiful. Golfito, Punta Arenas, Bayans Bay, and some of the high spots now. And then, from Costa Rica to Acapulco. Nicaragua was unfriendly apparently at that point in time.

Jim:

You're bashing up the coast at that point...

Dick:

It's mostly an offshore breeze. It was the trades. We weren't bashing. We were still south of the effect of the Pacific High.

Jim:

Okay.

Dick:

You had the Gulf of Tehuantepec to be worried about. And we thought about that quite a bit as we were going up. But we just stayed offshore. A big swell coming out of the Gulf. We had about 15 knots of wind. It was actually a pretty nice sail all the way up to Acapulco sailing on the beach there. Acapulco for a couple of weeks and then took off for the Hawaiian islands. And that was 26 days. But that was a beautiful sail. That was a long, beautiful, wonderful weather. Ended up taking a boat in tow off the north coast of Molokai. We were sailing along on the trades, it had gone a little bit into a Kona situation. But anyway, we ended up taking a sailboat and tow and they had sailed from Tahiti, but their engine had gone belly up and the wind had died and they were just drifting around and they were desperate to get in, and they were a bigger, fancier boat. And he just strung a line out [it was] was blowing southwesterly between the two islands, between Molokai and Oahu. It was like we were sailing that. And then on port tack along past Diamond Head and took him alongside, towed him into Lawai Harbor, and then took him alongside and pushed him over to the dock and the guy leaped off the boat and kissed the dock and all this kind of stuff. "Oh yeah. Yeah. I will buy you anything. We're going to go out to dinner," and all this. People have short memories. Here, we were kind of ragtag, sort of. I mean, at that point, I was eager to get home. I mean, it was time to get on with things. The boat was sort of ragged. Well, not really, but the dingy was beat up and it was just time to call it quits. And they were fancy, this fancy boat. And here, we were kind of hippie types ourselves. And they were really just kind of ... eh. That dinner never materialized... It was a nice stay in the Hawaiian Islands.

Jim:

[Laughing] And then, the last passage back to Port Townsend.

Dick:

Yeah, that was another 23 day affair.

Jim:

Okay. And what time of year?

Dick:

It got kind of rough. Let's see. We arrived back here the 1st of August. So it was in the first part of July. And the Pacific High, moved way north. We were way closer to Kodiak then we were the Straits of Juan de Fuca. I mean, we kept that Northeasterly, Northeasterly, Northeasterly, Northeasterly, trying to get north of the High. Sailing trip idea. And it was kind of a long, and then we got kind of beat up out there where that northerly came in and it was blowing like crazy, 500, 600 miles off the coast. In fact, we took the toughest knock of the whole trip on the last leg, 600, 700 miles off the coast out there. Big sea. We were down below boat. Boat, it was Southwesterly. Southwesterly. We were on Starboard Tack, as I recall. I'd have to look back through the photographs, but we were down below, had a parrot on board too for the whole trip.

Jim:

Get out of here.

Dick:

Had a small parrot on board and he was hanging in there. But we also had a larger parrot that we bought for peanuts at a market at Acapulco and smuggled into Hawaii. It was a featherless chick that we bought at a market in Acapulco. And that parrot ended up chewing up the teak trim and stuff. I didn't notice what was happening. Anyway, the parrot was sitting on the flipper, the pump at the galley sink. It was one of these whale flipper pumps. And he was sitting on that thing and chewing on the teak trim, bulkhead trim. Bastard.

Jim:

You had two parrots on board?

Dick:

Yeah, we did.

Jim:

What were their names?

Dick:

Well, Birdie was the little one for lack of anything. It was just Birdie. And Pilot. Emma named the other one he was a Mexican double yellowhead and he turned into a big bird finally. But yeah, he was Pilot and he imitated Emma. He'd cry like Emma.

Jim:

Oh really?

Dick:

Yeah. It was crazy. And he'd go, "Hello Pilot." Hello, he had this deep ... he could imitate my voice and then he'd go, "Hello, Pilot. Hello, Pilot." He'd switch into Emma's voice. It was pretty weird.

Jim:

So you get in the storm coming back. About what latitude are you at that, are you still pretty far north? Are you closer down here?

Dick:

I think we're probably about 52. Yeah, we were north of the States.

Jim:

Off Haida Gwaii kind of thing?

Dick:

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Yeah, we were central. Basically, we sailed south and east to make the entrance of the straits. But yeah, I'm not dead sure exactly when the longitude was. I'd have to look back. And I've still got all those charts and stuff with the little scratchings on them and a lot of the plotting sheets that I'd make up to do the everyday sights and all that stuff. Still have that stuff.

Jim:

You said the hardest knock you got was there? So did you get knocked all the way down?

Dick:

Well, I was down below and it was rough, but boat sailing itself, well, shortened down. It might have been blowing 35 or so, maybe. Hard to say. Not cold. All of a sudden, it was just one of these freaks that, woo, you would feel this, try to drop down into, and then rise up, and then crash. We got dropped on our side, dark. Everything went dark. Water squirted into the dorades and around the corner of the hatch, which was closed. I'd whip it open and look out every once in a while and close it back up.

But yeah, I opened that thing up. The cockpit was filled, the weather clothes were in tatters, basically. They're rotted anyway, the sun by then had pretty much done away with some of the stuff. And anyway, everything drained out, line streaming over the stern. We had a taffrail log. That was the log, was the taffrail, one of these walker logs, and one of the lines got tangled up in that. Anyway, but yeah, that was toughest knock of the whole five-year trip.

Jim:

But no serious damage?

Dick:

No serious damage. That boat ... I mean, it was just simple and strong. And that spar was [strong]. It went around again. This guy I sold it to took nine years. It went around again.

Jim:

Oh. So anyway, you make it back to through the Strait and land in Port Townsend.

Dick:

Yep.

Jim:

Did the town come out to cheer you in?

Dick:

Kind of, yeah, sort of. Roger Hills and a lot of the people, Mark Welch, and a lot of the people that was, it still is, the yacht club, the Port Townsend Yacht Club thing there. And we had a little party. Drank champagne and stuff like that. Had all the flags of all the countries we visited. Penny had made flags for courtesies for every place and put those up. And we came in and tied right up right down here.

Jim:

Right here in Boat Haven [the main marina in Port Townsend].

Dick:

Yeah, right here. Left out of here and came back to here.

Jim:

And this was early 80s, then? '82?

Dick:

Yeah. 1982. First of August 1982, got back. I'm not sure, I haven't researched the history at all, but I think that, so far, I think I'm the only boat to leave Port Townsend, circumnavigate back to Port Townsend. I'm not dead sure about that. I know that in modern times, I think I was the first local person to do that, and having completed the boat here, and then come back to here. So I think that's the case. I'm not sure. Maybe in modern times now, maybe there's somebody else has done it from here. I know there's other people that are living here now that have gone around. But I'm not sure anybody left from here and came back to here as a Port Townsend native, too.

Jim:

Yeah. Pretty cool.

Dick:

It is kind of cool. Now that I think about it.

Jim:

You get back and somehow you end up on a tugboat.

Dick:

Yep. Immediately. I mean, I didn't know anything about that engineering stuff anymore, much less care about it really. I mean, the truth of it was that I'd always just wanted to go sailing and I'd been fascinated by tugs and that sort of thing and ended up ... George Cotton of Cotton Corporation, a local guy here who was a friend of my parents back in those days, Leo Zeel, who ran the mill, George Cotton, you had all these local doctors and all that. It's just like that was the social milieu. And George Cotton had an acquaintance of a guy who ran a towing company out of Bainbridge Island, a guy named Boyer Halverson, who had a bunch of little tugs.

Back in those days as well, you had to get "Seamen's papers" before you were allowed to join the union - the Seamen's Union, SUP, or the inland boatman or MMP, of course. And I didn't have any of that stuff, but Halverson [Boyer] Towing was non-union outfit, Halverson Towing, and ran to Alaska, ran a freight barge, just containers and roll on stuff out of the Duwamish River for, did that for three and a half years, sailed as a deckhand, started out as a buck deckhand.

Jim:

And then you were living on Bainbridge at that point. Or were you living here?

Dick:

Living here. Yeah, living up above, living uptown, second floor place across from what's now the Finisterre restaurant.

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Jim:

Did Penny like it here?

Dick:

Penny? Yeah, I met her at the Town Tavern.

Jim:

Well, that's right.

Dick:

I mean she came here. Jay Gould, I don't know if you've ever heard of him, Arletta Gould was his wife, Arletta Johnson, Phil Johnson's sister. Anyway, Port Townsendites, and Jay Gould introduced us in the Town Tavern She was an English woman who was just passing through. But she was one of these people that, even if she didn't know anything about something, she'd tell you she did. And she was quick on the uptake.

Jim:

So you're living here and you're working on the tugs and you probably had a much different background than most of the deck hands on the tugs you were with.

Dick:

True? I did.

Jim:

Did you get along with everybody?

Dick:

It didn't help me much, really. I mean my experience at sea made me really like the job. I mean, I was in heaven going on board a tug to Alaska. Are you kidding me? This kind of thing was just like ... And the scenery... running a groove into the inside passage. Every two weeks, we were leaving the same dock at the same time. The only thing you knew is that you were going to be leaving, that when you left, you were going to be leaving that same dock in two weeks. So you'd cut every corner and unlash before you'd get to the dock. I did all that stuff.

I was a deckhand. I got promoted. Unfortunately, a guy, Les, who was the deckhand engineer, died on a motorcycle within a few weeks of my first trip with him, and so I ended up getting a field promotion and then I sailed as deck hand engineer, got licenses after a few years, and then moved away from Boyer to larger boats with a different outfit and ended up spending about 10 years in the towing industry, six years as captain, running the coast, and Alaska, and towed oil rigs in the Bering Sea and big tugs, really big tugs. One of them you could take on 225,000 gallons of fuel and the whole back deck would be awash. 155 feet by 44 foot beam, V20 EMD GM EMDs down below 10,000 horses.

Jim:

Wow.

Dick:

Big Kort nozzles. 12 foot by diameter by 12 foot pitch and Kort nozzles on these things. Those are some big tugs, and I ran one of those. I ran a number of those. We had six of them, company had six of them. It was Marine Logistics Corporation, the Marine Power and Equipment offshoot, the Wicks. Pete Wick was the father, Richard Wick, and they built the Issaquah-class ferries and ended up went belly up. I stepped off that company just as they were going under, too. I was lucky enough to get out without being kicked out...

Jim:

Yeah. We're getting long on time here...

Dick:

I know we are.

Jim:

Might have to talk again because I know there's got to be amazing stories about those tug days and we haven't even talked about the pilot days.

Dick:

Oh yeah, I know. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love talking about this stuff. I'm too long-winded.

Jim:

No, no, this is great. I mean, this is exactly what...

Dick:

To relive this stuff in your head.

Jim:

So anyway, let's just go to the pilot thing, and so you do the tugs and then how do you get the idea that you want to become a Puget Sound Pilot?

Dick:

Well, my father had a fraternity brother at the UW who he was in the Merchant Marine. He sailed for Puget Sound Shipping, ran small ships around here and around the Pacific up to Alaska and wherever. Philip Luther, who was a pilot, and he was a bigwig in a way. He was on the commission for a while and he was president of the group for a while.

And anyway, ever since I was a child, he had this kind of gruff voice, "Ah, it's a great life," and, "Ah, keep track of all your trips because you got to document all your experience." Anyway, I didn't have the license grade to qualify for the pilotage. You needed to have at least a thousand ton license, my mate was 500 tons, but then... Or no, the thousand ton... I ended up with a thousand ton freight and towing license, which then the Coast Guard got rid of the freight and towing license per se, and then you could end up with an uninspected towing vessel license, or you get the actual... on the Merchant Marine side, you ended up with a 3000, 1600, 3000 international, 3000 gross international, and 1600 was the

minimum tonnage to be able to sit for pilotage, for pilotage endorsements, the federal that you had to get to even qualify to take the state exam.

So I bagged that. I didn't think I'd even qualify, but then things changed and I ended up with a 1600 ton license. And so I was able to start accumulating my endorsements, pilotage endorsements, and drawing all the charts and this sort of thing. And I met a woman who was the director of the Wooden Boat Foundation, and we got married, my second wife, Mary Dietz.

Jim:

What happened to Penny?

Dick:

Penny, when Penny... Yeah, there's a gap there, information gap. But yeah, Penney and I, we argued always. She was a combative, tough... she was smart, argumentative, contrary, capable, a great partner on the boat, but as soon as the trip, the common project thing was over, our attempt at living a traditional lifestyle, and I was gone immediately on tugs and she just developed... It's a seaman's lament. She developed her own circle of friends and her own style, and I had to battle my way back into the household every time I came home. So that ended. Unfortunate but true.

Jim:

Yeah.

Dick:

It is. Anyway, I met Mary. At that point, I was hopeful about being able to qualify to become a pilot and everything, but she ran the Wooden Boat Festival back in the eighties, '84, '85, '86, '87, I guess. She was the director, put the Wooden Boat Foundation on the map here. She was a go-getter and she got corporate sponsorships and had Labatt's Brewery involved and really turned it into a growing concern. It evolved from an alternate lifestyle group into this business that... Anyway, she ended up took a job in Seattle. We got married and she took a job in Seattle, worked for Nordstrom down there, but she kept needling me. She wasn't into the tug scene. This two weeks on, two weeks off deal. I had a sack job going too.

I was delivering a chemical barge to California. Sailed from Bellingham, run the boat lite out of Seattle, sailed from Bellingham, take the barge to Eureka, go across the bar, tie it up at the Louisiana Pacific. You'd go from Georgia Pacific Bellingham to Louisiana Pacific with chlorine, caustic, and sulfuric acid and tie it up. And then we didn't have anything to do with cargo discharge. We'd be 48 to 70 hours in Eureka, just tied up alongside the city dock.

I mean, some of the guys on the boat had girlfriends and I was able to... I mean, had pilotage for Humboldt Bay and the Coast Guard started to require dangerous cargo to have a pilot on board. I was accustomed to drawing those charts and stuff, and so I just drew the Humboldt Bay chart. The company couldn't get me... Everybody wanted that job because it was basically two weeks on, two weeks off, 13 day trip, and then the next delivery would be a couple weeks later. But I was able to pick my own crew and all this stuff. As tugs jobs went and it was great. Ran the Columbia, took that barge up to Portland on the way home. We'd go to Eureka, Portland, see it back Bellingham, tie it up, tie the boat up in Seattle, go home for a couple of weeks. But she wasn't keen on that. It wasn't... And I was drawing the charts and everything, so she kept the iron to me.

Jim:

And so when you talk about drawing the charts as a pilot, you have to be able to draw from memory every chart basically in Puget Sound, is that right?

Dick:

You have had to do that to qualify to take the state exam back in those days. You have to get all the qualifying experience trips. You have to make multiple trips, well, 15 round trips in each zone. There's 24 charts to draw, so it's one of these deals. It's an onerous undertaking to begin with. And you've still got this thing out in the distance that the state exam that you might fail. So it was one of these things where you're putting in a lot of time chasing ships. You had to put an application in with the pilots association back in those days to ride along on the ships to get some of the port round trips, chasing ships around in the middle of the night, calling up the pilot and begging your way on board, "Is it all right if I come on board and observe, sir?" This kind of deal. And after I became a pilot, I was on the committee then to choose those...

It was really the gateway into the pilotage was getting onto the observer ship core to be able to ride as an observer to get all the port trips and the main ship channel trips and all that sort of thing. Otherwise, you had to have them on a certain tonnage on the tugs.

Bellingham and Seattle, and I got those myself because the barge was of was of larger tonnage and we'd tow lumber barges out of Seattle and all this kind of thing. But the other ports you had to ride ships, is all there was to it. Anyway, yeah, I did that and then I qualified and took the exam in 1991. And actually, I had a job lined up with Victoria Clipper after the exam, but I passed really high and so I had to go into the training program immediately. So it wasn't like I had to, I was allowed to go into the training program immediately, which was a six month deal. Six months later, Cinco de Mayo in 1992 was my very first day. Yeah, 5th of May.

Jim:

So you did that for like 30 years?

Dick:

25 years.

Jim:

So you saw a lot of changes probably in that time.

Dick:

Yeah, ships got bigger. Ports remained the same size dock. The dock configurations change. Cruise ships started coming. It was larger container ships when I first began. Of course, you get graduated up in the tonnage. The more years you put in, the larger the ships become, the higher experience necessary. And the responsibility of course, tankers and cruise ships and whatever. But you first started out on those log ships and there were a lot of them back then, too, and back in the early nineties and a lot of log ships.

Jim:

And I read a quote from you saying that pilots are all adrenaline junkies. Is that true, and were you one?

Dick:

I don't know. On one level or another, that's one of the things that is the most fun of... I mean there are very few experiences that one has in life of that where you are so totally alive as when you're... Maybe when you're landing a jet or something like that on final approach in an aircraft when you're totally focused. As you're lining a ship up for a narrow bridge, and turning a ship off a waterway and backing that thing up the waterway and putting it alongside. It's a great thrill, and adrenaline is part of the deal. Some of the guys don't like the job, actually. Some pilots retire early because they just don't like the pressure ... I was just too dumb to worry about hitting stuff.

I just line her up for the bridge and motor on through and no real big deal. Keep her idle a little in the middle. Some guys are visualizing the disaster of contact. It takes nothing to do millions of dollar's worth of damage.

Jim:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Did you ever have any real close calls?

Dick:

I was really lucky. I mean, the saying goes you make your own luck, I guess. I think that I was a good ship handler. I might not have been a great ship handler, but I never had any real... The one issue that I had was a power failure on board the ship, that it was a controllable pitch prop backing out of a dock in Everett, and it had a bunch of forest products on board, backing out of a dock in Everett. There's a log boom across the way.

I was backing out one of those interior docks down the port of Everett. I went to give it positive pitch to come ahead. Bow had cleared the dock. I was having the tug push the bow through, so I was going to go turn the bow to head down and out. I got no positive pitch, so we were going backwards and the tug on the steering and says, "You're getting kind of close." I'm saying, "Okay." First was dead slow ahead, slow ahead, half ahead, not getting any response. The buzz, it was the Indian crew, buzz on the real house is unintelligible to me, but I can... There's a pitch indicator, I'm getting nothing. He says, "You're tug is getting close to logs over here, cap." And I said, "I realize that." "So full ahead, cap." Nothing. Anyway, the tug guy says, "You better start rooting on her, cap because we're getting really close."

So I had the tug on the bow push like crazy, and then I got it so that we just lay up against the log boom quietly. Anyway, then I had the tugs pull us away. The boom, the bag boom around the log boom across there, the chains, the boom chains, one of the boom chains had parted, so the bag boom opened up and some of the bundles came floating out and stuff. And I got underway and I made an entry in the log, had the captain make an entry in the log, all this kind of thing about the power failure and et cetera, et cetera. And we did make contact with log boom. And anyway, I talked to Foss and they just round those things up and hook up another boom chain, no real big deal. Well, it turns out that Foss wasn't involved with that section, that was Dunlap, but they had to get a boat underway from Marysville to come down. Somebody had to come up with 1500 bucks, and they'll come after... The pilot is the designated fall guy in all that stuff, but that's your job. So the first person they start... So I called Burt Holmes was the... well, I think it was my second year. Burt Holmes was the president at that point. I called him up. I got to the station, told him what had happened. He says, "Well, did you damage any logs?" I said, "Why, no. I mean..." He said, "Well, then don't worry about it. We'll see what happens." About an hour later he calls back and says, "Better get yourself an attorney, because they want 1500 bucks." But I had all the documentation, I had the log, the copy of the log. I had told VTS, made the declaration to VTS...

Jim:

The Vessel Traffic Service?

Dick:

Yeah. We'd had a power event, lost power, engine hadn't stopped. We couldn't actuate positive pitch. So anyway, and I got off. Ended up the shipping company ended up paying the 1500 bucks, or the agency or whatever it was representing them. But that was the only thing in all those years...

Jim:

That's amazing.

Dick:

It's amazing how many times you lose power and things don't start up or the bow thruster quits or something, or you part a tug line or something like that. Two or three or four, depending on the year, but [that is] when you really reach into your bag a little bit to pull out a trick of some sort. Rest of the time it's pretty much routine. It's exciting. Every day's different.

Jim:

Ever have any trouble getting on or off the ships? Any close calls?

Dick:

I didn't. I mean, I'm not a big guy, so I always have tried to keep myself in shape. So I go up and down the ladder pretty easily. But it is a little bit of an eye opener when you hang your leg over the gunnel in the middle of the night in the driving rain and there's that little pilot boat down there, and you're descending, is more difficult than going up. Going up is physically it's a challenge, but not really. Some guys would have problems and they'd get really worried about the ladder. But again, I'm just too dumb to worry about that, I guess. It was a great job.

Jim:

Sounds like it.

Dick:

I still miss it. Yeah, I mean I've been, what, out for seven years, still miss it. Had lunch just the other day with one of the dispatchers that I worked with. I was president of the pilots for a couple of years, that I worked with and I still...

Jim:

Do you know Leif and Joan Knutsen and their son, Severin, who's a pilot now?

Dick:

Sure, yeah.

Jim:

Okay. I interviewed Leif, he was the first one I interviewed in this series.

Dick:

Right. In fact, I talked to his... I ran into another kid... kids, I mean everybody under the age of 60 is a kid. But I ran into another guy up in the islands just last week because I had one of these shirts on that's got the boat. It's Tim Nolan's design, the boat on the front it says, "Pilot," it's a pilot boat. One of them on the back, one of them on the front, t-shirts ... And this guy comes up to me, he says, "Oh, you've been on the pilot boat or something?" And I said, "Well, yeah, I was a pilot for 25 years." He says, "Really?" Well, he leans forward and he's got the logo, that I designed by the way, on his hat. And he says, "I've been a pilot for two years, what's your name?"

The acronyms, you always have on the dispatch sheet. MCC was my acronym. I used the first three letters of the guy's last name, but he was MCG because he can't use MCC because I have MCC and I'm still on the payroll with my retirement, which is a small retirement program that the pilots have, but I get a check every month on the retirement thing. And I'm still technically on the list, but he's MCG, yeah.

Jim:

So after you retired, I mean, you probably had a boat. Did you boat recreationally while you were a pilot as well?

Dick:

Had a Swan 44 for a while. Mary and I sailed that. We went around Desolation, sailed around the sound, raced it a little bit. I had it on Bainbridge. I had a boat that I commuted to Seattle with, Eagle Craft, aluminum crew boat kind of thing, built in Campbell River. I've got one now, actually. I've got a 32 footer that I have tied up down here. "West Wind" is the name of it. It's a blue 32 footer.

Jim:

And that's the one you had up in the Islands last week?

Dick:

Yeah.

Jim:

So that's the one you cruise on now?

Dick:

Yeah, right, yeah. It's got a couple of v-births up forward.

Jim:

Cool.

Dick:

I cruise it around 14 knots. It's got a Volvo D6 350 in it. Yeah, a little galley, and...

Jim:

Any clue how many miles you have under the keel with all of your boating for the years? Did you try to keep track of any of that?

Dick:

Honestly, statistically, I have no idea. I handled thousands of ships. I mean, you basically handle between 175 and 200 ships a year. I mean, it's 88 miles Tacoma, 116 miles to Olympia, 66 miles to Seattle from the pilot station. I'd have to add that up. That'd be an interesting thing to ballpark, I guess. But I honestly don't have any idea. I'm not even sure how far the circumnavigation was. I've never really put the numbers together.

Jim:

Did you miss the open ocean when you were doing the pilot work? I mean, you were all here in the Salish Sea. You didn't miss being out there?

Dick:

As you know, there's a thrill of the open sea that you just don't get anywhere else. The rise of a deep, powerful swell, even though it might be a distant just long period, powerful swell off Cape Flattery or off the Columbia, but you're farther out there. But I didn't really miss the tugs per se, because when I was working the tugs, there wasn't much schedule. It was like when there's a lot of times when we're working for Boyer. When the boat worked, you worked, that was it. Sometimes 24, 25 days a month. Spent most of my life with the same people on board. That KIRSTEN H, 76 foot boat running on the inside to Alaska.

Jim:

Anything else we should talk about before we call her quits? Any particular stories or anything else of interest that...

Dick:

I've got a million stories.

Jim:

Any advice for somebody coming up on... Any young people coming up that want to have a career?

Dick:

And try and get do the pilotage thing?

Jim:

Pilotage, or just as a career as a captain or the marine trades.

Dick:

There is a lot of opportunity in the maritime trades right now. The academies kick out students with third mate tickets all the time. Tugs...anybody who is worth their salt, basically ferry system is looking for people. They're tying boats up because they can't get people. And one of the issues is the federal license drug testing requirement. It's a federal license. My license expires here [soon]. I renewed it once after I retired just for ego's sake, I guess. But I was going to renew it. It expires here, well, the 20th of this month it expires finally. I would have to do the whole thing all over again if I wanted to. It's not

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going to happen. But I would have to go in and they take a tuft of hair for the drug test. It's not just pee in the bottle deal.

Jim:

Wow.

Dick:

And I would have to take the whole basic safety training firefighting deal, re-up my STCW certificate and the TWIC card too, (transportation worker identification certification). I'd have to re-up all that stuff and they make it a little bit onerous. But there are jobs out there for young people. And Port Townsend, the Maritime center, and the program that they have up at the high school up here, and this, a sea based oriented curriculum. I think that I would've loved that I'd been a kid. And there's a lot of opportunity out there and the pay is pretty damn good, you start out in a six-figure income, some of these jobs, and you might be gone a fair amount. It ain't hay, that's for sure.

Jim:

Well, great. I know there is a million more things we could talk about, but we're over two hours now, I think, so it's probably time to call it, but thank you very much.

Dick:

Well, you're welcome, and I'll see you around.