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ERIC NELSON

“If you can’t be the winner, be the show.”

By Matt Thomas, CYCT Historian

THE RACER

There is probably no one in our club more at home racing sailboats than Eric Nelson. On race day, you will see Eric standing at the helm of Gardyloo, laughing and joking, un-phased by whatever chaos is ensuing around him. Or, he’s skippering Romeo Charlie, setting challenging race courses and yelling encouragement to the participants. As a racer, Eric consistently performs at the highest level and does so with gusto. As Eric says, “If you can’t be the winner, be the show.”

Eric’s parents were early members of the CYCT. They introduced Eric to sailboat racing as a child. Now, Eric is doing the same, introducing his own son, Talisker, to sailing. Talisker participated in his first sailboat race at six weeks of age. Like his dad, Talisker is at home racing; he slept like a baby during his entire first race.

EARLY YEARS

When Eric was about ten years old, he started sailing with his father and a neighbor. Soon, Eric’s parents bought their own boat, which was an O’Day 27. Eric remembered that, back in those days, they would sometimes have to sail through clouds of steam when Asarco dumped slag in Commencement Bay.

Eric’s parents soon enrolled Eric in sailing lessons. The classes were held at a boatyard on the Ruston side of Commencement Bay near where the sewer outhaul buoy is. Eric went screaming and crying to that first lesson. (Eric jokes that he must have known how much money he would spend on

sailing). However, by the second lesson, Eric was hooked and could not get enough of sailing.

At that time, the CYCT had a junior sailing program in which about 30 kids participated. The junior sailor races were held near the permanent green buoy at Hylebos Waterway. Eric and the rest of the CYCT junior sailors also competed in the Seattle Yacht Club McCurdie Cup. Eric recalls that they got stomped. Eric and about 8-12 of the CYCT junior racers even went to Chelan to participate in a regatta. Eric sailed in an El Toro and also a Laser.

Eventually, Eric had to leave for college at Washington State University. But, even in the Palouse, Eric found a way to race. There was a Thistle fleet in Lewiston, Idaho. So, Eric would go to Lewiston where he and one or two crew members raced at Snake Island State Park in Eric's Thistle.

WINDSEEKERS AND GARDYLOO

When Eric returned to Tacoma after completing college, he competed in Windseeker races as crew on a Crown 34. He also raced in the Duck Dodge in Seattle and raced in Kirkland. Eric raced out of State as well, racing to Hawaii twice, rounding Vancouver Island, and racing in California and in Utah.

Over the years, Eric became a part owner of an Olson 30 and later an Express 37. Eventually, Eric went on to own the legendary (or as Eric says, maybe the infamous - depending on who you ask) Henderson 30 named Gardyloo.

Eric consistently led the fleet in Gardyloo. No matter the wind, Gardyloo went through race courses like a hot knife through butter. Eventually, Eric took Gardyloo on the road to test her and her crew's abilities in unfamiliar places.

SUMMER OF OUR DISCONTENT

Eric describes the Puget Sound as a beautiful place to play on the water. However, one drizzly, cold day, Eric and his crew thought, "We don't have to do this." Eric had a trailer for Gardyloo. They asked themselves, "Why not race in warm places?" That very day, on the inside of a Tecate beer box,

they mapped out their season. They would do the Delta Ditch, Tahoe, Santa Cruz to Monterrey, Double Dam on the Columbia, and a Memorial Day race in Richmond. Eric called it “the summer of our discontent.”



It was a team effort. Eric's crew of eight contributed to the costs for fuel, entry fees, and storage. Everyone arranged their schedules, so Gardyloo would have crew for all the races.

ON DRY LAND, BUT NOT FOR LONG

Following the summer of their discontent, it was time for a break. Eric felt like they had done it all. He and Aubre sold Gardyloo. They devoted themselves to life on land. However, this hiatus did not last long.

By the following year, they were ready to buy another sailboat. This time, they wanted something in which they could cruise and race. They found the boat, a 38 foot IMX, made in Denmark. She was christened "Gardyloo II."

COMMODORE NELSON

Eric's dad was a member of the CYCT at the inception of the club. Years later, in 2016, Eric's parents were there at the Commodore's Ball to watch Eric become Commodore.

Thinking back, Eric says that his year as commodore seems like a blur now. They tried everything the club had: Cruises, races, and other items that they tried to mix in.

Eric recalls how much he enjoyed the Daffodil and Opening Day cruises - especially arriving with the club and heading back to Tacoma from Seattle. "It is just a damn fine group of people to hang out with."

Eric's advice to CYCT members is to volunteer and get to know more of the members. "It is a great way to spend your day with others with the same likes."