

# The Mainsheet

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50

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This edition of *The Mainsheet* is dedicated to the memory of James "Doc" Gilbert.



*These are words written or spoken about Doc since his passing.*

"'Scruffy' in appearance and demeanor, Jim Gilbert was an adventurer and mentor in my mind, and who knows, but that he passed from this world doing what he loved best, racing his Lightning and enjoying the camaraderie and the thrill of competition... I am reminded of the quote, 'The gods do not subtract from man's allotted time, those hours messing around in boats.' Doc personified that quote for me and while I wasn't there on that tragic day, I'll bet he was competing 'till the end, asking no quarter nor giving any."

"Doc was one of the most untiring competitors we have had in the Dixie District."

"It doesn't seem possible that there is a world without Jim Gilbert."

"I was saddened to hear about Doc Gilbert. On the other hand, he departed in a blaze of glory. He was happiest when he had his spinnaker flying."

"A wonderful doctor, a great sailor and a warm friend to all of us."

"I knew Doc years ago at the sailing marina, one time he let me try his ice boat."

"I'll always remember Jim Gilbert for his unmatched love of sailing, his sportsmanship, his good humor and generosity...May the style and elegance Doc put into his life affect us all forever."

"My last memory of Doc is of him looking for a piece of wire for his boomvang, on the beach of Leesylvania Park."

"I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stayed as in what direction we are moving; to reach the port of heaven we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it—But we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor."

"The two people I admire most in sailing, besides Doc, had learned from him what sailboat racing is all about. I don't think this is a confidence."

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

**Remarks  
in memory of  
James B. "Doc" Gilbert**

**Delivered by Jim Dillard, April 30, 1992**

It is an honor and a privilege to be able to help celebrate the life of Doc Gilbert. It has been impossible for those of us who loved him dearly, not to be deeply saddened, but when a life has been supremely well lived, and brought to a fitting close, it is not a time for mourning. It is a time for rejoicing and such was the life that has just ended.

Our meeting tonight is to celebrate the fullness of life which we saw and loved. To say he would want no show of mourning would be true, but grief does touch us deeply. Surely, his own refusal to live timidly and hoard his hours should teach us to shake off grief and celebrate life.

He loved life and spent it boldly. He loved friends truly and gave them treasures and teachings which increase on recollection. Truly we are grateful for his living and for all he gave to so many. We celebrate his being.

For those of us who loved this man our words are inadequate. He is the ultimate source of our consolation.

Thankfulness should be the tenor of this occasion as we realize how many lives have been touched, tenderly encouraged and enlightened by Doc.

Everyone that was ever associated with him has a lode of Gilbert stories. Frank Gallagher and I were reminiscing the other night and I want to share a couple of stories with you.

When Frank was still in college in Dayton Ohio he was sitting in an economics class when someone came in and whispered in the professor's ear. The professor then called Frank forward and told him there was an urgent message for him at the dean's office and he was to go there immediately. Well, of course, Frank expected some family crisis and went to the office with fear and trepidation. When he got there what he found was a Western Union telegram and money order: MONEY WIRED stop PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO ST. PETE stop DOC. Needless to say, Frank sailed St. Pete. Frank sailed a lot with Doc, they were like father and son, he sailed his first North American Championship with Doc and they had to leave a regatta they were leading to get there. He also survived the infamous Quantico Triangle Race with Doc. There were 99 boats at the regatta, 33 didn't even go out and only 33 finished, Doc was thirteenth in that race.

The story I like best is the swamp story. Doc was going from St. Pete to Miami with a broken trailer hitch rigged as only Doc could rig something. Doc had to slow up for a bump in the road when there was this awful noise from behind. Doc looked out the passenger side to see his boat and trailer cruising

along next to him. Well, the trailer took off at 60 MPH into the swamp and came to rest floating in a little lake with the trailer still strapped underneath. The story goes that it took them four hours to retrieve the boat and trailer.

Doc picked out my first Lightning. It was the ugliest boat I've ever seen. It had a silver radiator paint deck, royal blue topsides with a yellow water line stripe, and a red copper bottom. When I complained, Doc said not to worry, "It's the best boat down here." He was right, all it needed was a little green paint. Of course it was Doc who insisted that I race when all I wanted to do was day sail. The first time I turned over in a Lightning it was with Doc, My first Southern Circuit was with Doc. The list goes on for all of us, generation after generation. Like he adopted Frank, he took my daughter Christy under his wing and got her through her first regatta, and just last month he took her to her first Southern Circuit, sound familiar?

All of us have our memories of Doc's devotion to us as individuals and that is why his death is not without its sting. We labor under the loss of our friend. But victory is not for death, rather, it is for us who overcome our grief and adopt within our own lives the virtues of the life we mourn. Whatever it is that made us love him, his hopes, his noble intentions, his guiding hand - we ought to make real for others. Our highest tribute to him is that we will stand ready to continue his mission. This is the honor we would do him, this is the living perpetual trophy in his honor.

A fair wind and a following sea on your homeward run, Old Salt, we salute you as you pass.

**In Memoriam  
by Mike Arnold**

I first met Doc Gilbert more than twenty years ago at the Washington Sailing Marina the day I brought my first Lightning to that place—me a complete novice with perhaps three hours of small boat sailing experience in my entire life. I had just backed my trailer into my new dry slip when a distinguished but disheveled looking, late-middle-aged man with a piece of rope for a belt walked up to the boat and said in a gruff mumble: "You've got your stays backwards; the short one goes back here, and the long ones up there. Let's see ... (mumble) ... 7206. I know this boat ... (mumble) ... You bought it in Delaware, huh? Picture of it was on the front of the Sunday supplement ... (mumble) ... of the Philadelphia Inquirer about nine years ago. Needs transom bailers ... cut some holes here. Cover 'em with plastic ... (Mumble-mumble) ... Olsen boat ... probably sails fast upwind."

Within thirty minutes Doc had shown me how to take the mast down (my girlfriend and I had planned to use the marina's two-ton crane for the daunting chore), assembled about a dozen passers-by and directed them to turn the hull over on

my trailer for painting, convinced me that Lightnings existed to be raced and for no other honorable purpose, and made me promise to crew for him on the following Sunday. That was the beginning of a long learning process with a lot of help from a kindly man seeming obsessed—in a good-natured way—with small sailboats. I found out, of course, that I was only one of many scores of would-be sailors and pick-up crew introduced to the sport by Doc Gilbert, and that scores more would follow in years to come through what seemed like half the states.

He was a knowledgeable racing skipper and for most of his years a very competitive one—he dominated Fleet 50 local racing in the 'Fifties and 'Sixties. He didn't win much lately, but he never quit trying. At seventy-six years old (we never really knew how old he was until we read his obituary – Doc lied some) he continued to sail all over the country. If you were at the Southern Circuit this past winter, chances are you saw him at Savannah and St. Pete—still wearing a piece of rope around his waist instead of one of the many belts Nancy Gilbert and Gloria and Suzie gave him for Father's Day. He may even have luffed you up into the reeds if you were in the wrong place at the wrong time—nobody passed Doc on a spinnaker leg without a fight—and he probably blew that damn whistle at you once or twice. But, younger and stronger men finished behind him.

I will miss Jim Gilbert. I suppose other fleets and Districts have unconventional characters like him, but he was mine and yours, and I'm not all sure who will fill the void.

—Mike Arnold (With help from several of Doc's many friends)

## 1992 Beck's Potomac Cup

"Yee Haa!", as Doc would say. On April 25-26, Fleet 50 hosted the 8th Annual Potomac Cup Regatta, sponsored by Beck's Beer. Needless to say, the weekend did not turn out as planned after the wind in the second race claimed the life of our most honored and loved member, Doc Gilbert. Twenty-four boats, including out-of-towners from New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Maryland and Richmond, VA joined Fleet 50 for serious competition; four races—four different champs.

The first race went smoothly with Don De lorme grabbing the bullet. The winds calmed for the beginning of the second race and most had rounded the windward mark and put their kites up when 35-knot winds turned the placid waters into a rage that took the life of our friend. The sudden gust also took over four other Lightnings. Those who managed to stay upright finished the

race, catching quite a ride. Bob Astrove and Phil Grotheer took advantage of the blast, controlled their boats, and flew into first and second for the second race. Since the race committee was occupied with the overturned boats and the wind continued to blow, the third race was cancelled. The boats sailed into the park, nervously awaiting the explanation for the flashing red lights onshore. The news of course, was that it was Doc and that he had been rushed to the hospital with a slight vital sign. With prayers and hopes, everyone enjoyed a great barbecue dinner and plenty of beer, provided by Beck's. Saturday night, Dianne Sullivan graciously welcomed sailors to her townhouse to unwind and share "Doc" stories. Sunday's races were dedicated to Doc; Tom Doran and Fred Mertes sailed through the rain and chill to each pick up a first. Congratulations to Don Delorme, with crew Wanda and Jamie, winning this year's Cup.

The Potomac Cup Regatta has continued to grow and we were only short one boat of our goal of twenty-five this year. As word spreads of our great open waters and new facilities, we hope to reach our goal of 50 boats next year on the 50th Anniversary of Fleet 50.

On behalf of Doc's family and the fleet, I would like to thank Nancy Fertile for her help onshore, Mike Arnold and his race committee offshore, and Jim Dillard and Frank Gallagher for all they did. Situations as they were, created the need for special and irregular assistance. I don't think there could have been a group of people who could have handled the situation calmer or with more strength. We salute you and thank you.



## Captain's Corner

Another successful spring season for Fleet 50. We participated in five Sundays of racing, unfortunately we only had three days of actual sailing; one day was too windy and one too calm. We held our most successful Potomac Cup to date with 24 boats. Special thanks to Mike Arnold for expertly handling a difficult race committee assignment.

I believe all of you have heard the news of Doc's passing away at our Leesylvania regatta. We will miss Doc both on the race course and ashore. He was not only our most active participant the last few years, but a fleet and PRSA officer, and a Lightning class mainstay for over 40 years! I believe all of you have received a letter from Jim Dillard concerning setting up a memorial in Doc's name; if you haven't give him a call. This is very important, and I encourage you to respond promptly.

More on the Potomac Cup... We can't leave this subject without giving yet more thanks to Nancy Fehrle and Jim Dillard. They organized, organized, organized and executed. The regatta was completely and expertly managed. They did it all, thank you...

One other special thanks. Did anyone notice the fancy paint job on the bottom of Mike Arnold's boat? Frank Gallagher provided a day of sanding and painting.

### **NEW SAILING PLANNED FOR SUMMER!!!!!!**

I have spoken with a number of our members concerning Wednesday night racing this summer. We are going back to it! The Albacores have agreed to start us off the end of the dock. No guarantee of a windward leg, but what the hell! Tentative plans are to start the Wednesday after the Districts, June 24. I plan to telephone everyone prior. It should be fun. If you don't want to bring your boat, come down and crew, or let your crew have a chance at the helm. One or two races, short courses, casual, and a good chance to train crew...

### **LIGHTNING/THISTLE CHALLENGE!!!!!!**

Tentative scheduled for August 23, as a one-day event. We must supply the race committee, any ideas???

—Bob Astrove

## Fishing Bay Invitational

Bob Wardwell invited the Lightning sailors May 16-17th to the first of hopefully many Spring Invitational Regattas held on Fishing Bay. After sailing there last year for the District Championship, twelve of us were anxious to go back. Let me tell you, sailing there is almost as nice as Leesylvania (Sorry Bob, I'm biased!). Not only is the sailing there great, Bob and

his gang throw one heck of a party! The races were all very competitive with everyone sailing together, including me—for a while I was beating Freddie in one of the races he won -- won't mention whether he gained a lot or I really screwed up!

One of the highlights of the weekend was our battle of the boats. Between races Saturday, we on Ugly Bob innocently pulled out our tennis ball to play catch with No Excuses, but were assaulted by a lacrosse ball, a pink elephant water gun, and our mascot, Ugly Bob's Duck, was ducknapped. Boats joined in the water fight and ball pounding with everyone trying to steal the duck! At the brink of battle, a cease-fire was called with the white shape going up for the next race. The damages were costly on all sides—one really wet crew -- Mark fell off Jim Richard's boat in an attempt to steal the Duck (served him right in my opinion!); a broken paddle on Bob; and an elephant with a broken trunk for No Excuses.

Saturday night was quite the evening with starters of shish-a-bobs and a keg that went dry real quick. Not to worry, Mom brought champagne and Mike Beaver and I were officially graduated while my trusty crew Skip replenished the beer. Our usual DJ, Phil, played the right tunes and got most everyone dancing in the grass—and on the roof of the clubhouse—it was the only space big enough for all of us to do the Electric Slide! The evening was complete after the limbo and jump roping contests, a few of the guys need to come by my preschool to relearn how to jump rope!

Luckily for many of us, the races were postponed on Sunday. When the wind picked up, we had two great races with Fred and Bob picking up the firsts. The truce between the boats was broken with Bob's Duck being napped again, this time by Swill Dog. Chris drove onto their boat to rescue the duck, but was crew napped. I have to admit Phil won that battle, he had my duck and my crew and wouldn't give either one back. I think he decided to give Chris back when I told him he could keep him, in that light air being light might have helped me.

I have enclosed the results of the regatta elsewhere but will congratulate the winners here: Fred Merles with his outstanding crew of Buckey and Debbie!

## Let's Get Out of This Town

I admit I concentrated this last article on the extra-sailing affairs at Fishing Bay with less on the races. I did this with a purpose, however. I want Fleet 50 to remember, or realize if you're new to the fleet, how much FUN these District races are. Sailing, the experience you get racing two days against these guys is invaluable. I'm not trying to knock the river nor the people who race there, obviously I admire the ability or -people like my father and Frank who have sailed there many