

Windmill Wonder Years – 1978 Midwesterns Revisited (by Craig Tovell)

While cleaning my office recently, I came upon a Hoover Sailing Club *Leadline* article from 1978 from my junior year of high school that Windmill Class historian, Allen Chauvenet sent me this winter. Those were my *Wonder Years* in Windmilling -- a class I grew up with, crewing for my Dad, Bruce, and others like Gaylord Smith or Mike Hughes when Mom (Jan) was crewing for Dad.

Pictures speak a thousand words, no matter how distorted the photo and bring back many fond memories of the people who built the class. This one old image captures one given day that will last eternally.

Good friends and good people Don and Jan Sherman were visitors from Chicago representing the Wolfe Lake fleet. Being a mile inshore from Lake Michigan, the wind at Wolfe Lake blew planing conditions regularly, and the water foamed like Mr. Bubble from the effect of the nearby Proctor & Gamble plant. The Shermans, although light in body, were tough nuts and sailed great in heavy air and never sat down for bad weather. They were always good upwind or downwind. Their boat was white as they wore in their team zinc oxide and big, floppy sun hats. Don was droll and had a David Letterman ornery sense of humor and spoke through his teeth without moving his lips like a ventriloquist – as most native Chicagoans do.

North Carolinians Jim and Patsy Farley were good sailors and were the epitome of Southern hospitality, always opening their home when we visited. Other memorable Tarheel characters, Bill Swan and wild Joe McIntosh with hip flask tucked in his wetsuit made the Mountaineer unforgettable. They were so sweet, it never hurt when they kicked your butt. They always footed upwind and had the same green hull as Jon Adams which made them hard to tell apart on the water. They taught us slow cooking, about barbeque and introduced us to Brunswick Stew to later find out it was Squirrel.

Can't say enough about renaissance man, Bruce Tovell. He used to say "If you can read, you can do anything." The canned response to a question was jokingly, "Look it up." He saw something about boats at Hoover, they built 'em, then raced them. With workmanship came experimentation, and that is how we became competitive.

Craig Tovell finally got "hissself" a boat - #4500 from Rhinelander, Wisconsin, where my Mom and Dad trekked 14 hours to surprise me for my birthday. Beautiful furniture piece – and won the 1984 Nationals at Oriental. Roy Sherman inherited her years later. Super-fast, pointy, with deep tolerances up front and flat and wide in the back. Even today, this boat is still in my opinion better than anything on the water, with fiberglass outer shell and the first self-rescuable with full tanks. My buddies Matt & Charlie King (#4450 going to the new Erie Fleet), Jack Cleaves (#4499), Bill Cowen (#4470), and Larry McGinty, Sr. bought woodies from supreme craftsman Bob Salentine.

I have to lump Kinney, Chauvenet (Allen), and Wayt together because they're the North Carolinians who spooked me in my formative years as a crew at the Governor's Cup at Kerr Reservoir (Bruce Tovell won in 1976), where they team raced with their fancy hand signals and stuff. I'm not irrevocably scarred, but vividly recollect Tom Lathrop standing at the stern of his boat waving his arms while his main luffed like Nero played violin as Rome burned. Madness. We Ohioans eventually learned with Jim Fulton's help (Prosser's #4100, previously Peter Fontaine's and now Chris Bunge's) that a 1st and 3rd finish won a team race. So, we just did our own thing sans signals. Despite the hubbub, ya'll had Southern hospitality. One almost had to cup their hands around both ears to hear Merit & Sandy Wayt speak. John and Judy Kinney, quite the opposite in the heat of battle. All were just dynamite light air sailors. The least fond memory is the Carolina red mud that permeated any and everything from the camping slurry.

Past National, District 5 Champ, and class President, Paul Gerhardt was a big teddy bear. Kind of a sage you don't ask questions because you don't really want the answer. Paul was old-school with a standard wood hull and mast before Dennis Fontaine and his funky Floridian troupe showed up with these fancy, odd fiberglass boats, with aluminum masts and Dacron sails. Took us about 3 years to catch up and sadly give up on wood altogether...

John Kincheloe was a great architect with a beautiful family who was a core of our growing fleet who passed unexpectedly at age 42. My Dad bought #4200 sister ship to Rollie & Anne King's #4206 and I'm still sailing it to this day (won 2013 NAs). Apparently, Roger Moorman made some solid boats. Still competitive after 40 years. Six of the 29 boats in the event pictured won Nationals.

In retrospect, it's impressive to see Ted Turner in such esteemed company, competitively racing the Hoover Sailing Club Junior junker Windmill. Todd Cowan and I as crew beat it up as kids where we went on a Nantucket Sleigh-ride -- planing down the reservoir for a mile hanging onto the transom after a poor capsize recovery. Ted was like Mr. Haney from Green Acres with a barn full of stuff for every occasion and a spurious fleet of boats. He was the original Picker or Hoarder, depending on how you look at it. We bought #3251 where my sister Margo and I won the NAs at Bantam Lake, CT. It's back at Hoover with Nate Bachman. Four's a charm, fixer upper.

Mike Mickelson and Russ Chauvenet can be contrasts like Tycho Brahe and Bobby Fisher. It's the making of a joke. "What did the Astrophysicist say to the Chess master? Answer: Only they know, stupid!" If you had time for them to complete their train of thought, you'd have moss growing on your north side. Seriously, Mike & Dixie have been like my surrogate parents and have been racing competitively for over 50 years. Bravo. They're what sailing's all about. They taught Cindy and I to sit down when it's blowing too hard to have fun. Mike & Jim Ferguson were WCA builders keeping the class afloat after Moorman. I crewed for Russ at the 1976 NAs at Lake Gaston. The man had the patience of a saint. He was Allen's Dad, see.

If you know the whereabouts of our compatriots' email (c4tovell@aol.com). Love to hear from you!