

Welcome aboard

Captain Tore shares his passion for the celebrated *Sea Chanty*



The first things I noticed about the captain of *Sea Chanty* was his quick smile, the boyish gleam in his eyes, and mass of white hair. It was a blistering summer afternoon and sweat beads dripped into his shaggy eyebrows. But the heat and humidity didn't stop the 92-year old from working on his classic wooden yacht, gently bobbing on the Chesapeake Bay.

Rows of luxury boats and yachts reflected from the sun-kissed harbor, but it was the rustic charm of *Sea Chanty* and the old man varnishing it that caught my eye.

The writer in me danced to life. When it comes to "good life" destinations, I sensed this was a favorite destination for the captain. I introduced myself and asked about his boat. "Just call me Tore," he said, shaking my hand like an old friend. "I call her *Sea Chanty*, like a song of the sea - a working song that comes with labor," he explained.

It's a fitting name. The captain has dedicated more than half a century to maintaining the boat and preserving its history. "Most boats today are fiberglass. This one is wood. It has a unique teak bottom up to the rub rail, then it's mahogany," he said. "With the marine environment, she requires ongoing upkeep, especially on the hull and deck. It can get labor intensive. My favorite part is varnishing. I love that!"



Captain Tore and Sea Chanty

Written by Carol Martino

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He stuffed the polishing cloth into his pocket and invited me on board for a tour. It was like stepping into a museum of his life - a life anchored in the pride of the time he served in the United States Navy. I learned that Salvadore "Tore" Vizzini is a retired Naval officer, a Commander USN, and enjoys his continued association with the Navy. In 1964, he and his father Phillip purchased the boat, a Pacific Coast Trawler, shortly after it was built in Hong Kong. "There were only seven of them built," he said. His father was a well known builder who helped build the marine stadium at the Annapolis Naval Academy.

Memorabilia from scrapped Navy ships and surplus stores are showcased in the pilot house - each with a story to tell. Tore gripped the timeworn steering wheel, salvaged from a ship designed to clear mines in waterways, as he pointed out an inclinometer from the USS Tennessee battleship which "measured the vessels slant." He's also proud of the marine sextant, an historic instrument once used for celestial navigation. "Even with today's technology, I prefer to use the stars to determine my position on water," he expressed.

After returning from active duty in the Korean War, Tore taught seamanship and navigation at the Annapolis Naval Academy. He then spent time in the Navy Reserves where his expertise and leadership was an asset during various operations; he retired in 1974. Later on, he served 17 years in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, protecting the marine environment, defending its borders, and going out on search and rescue missions.

Like his father, Tore has a keen knowledge of naval architecture; after retiring, he worked as a consulting engineer. Back in those days, he spent many windblown weekends aboard *Sea Chanty* with his wife Marie and their children. "In the summer, we often docked at Ocean City, and the kids slept in the crews quarters. During the week, they enjoyed the beach and lively boardwalk, and I'd join them on weekends," he said, adding that it wasn't all fun and games. "I've always run the boat like a navy ship, everyone aboard shares the responsibilities." Tore and Marie parted ways in 1970, but he cherishes the family adventures they shared aboard the yacht.

Some memories, however, he'd like to forget - like the time a submerged telephone pole was lurking in murky water. "The first three years on the boat were smooth sailing, but in 1967, while cruising through the Delaware Bay at night, we hit a pole. It went through the engine room portside. I immediately headed for shallow water at Reedy Island to beach the boat. We had to abandoned ship. The next morning, the tide and current had moved her 12 miles down the bay, and she had sunk down to the bow. Local watermen pumped her out, and we had her towed

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back to the Chesapeake Bay and on to the Gibson Island Yacht yard ."



It was then that Tore decided to redesign *Sea Chanty* after the Grand Alaskan Yacht, also built in Hong Kong. "I liked the design and performance. I repowered her with a 130 H.P. Lehman; she cruises at 8 or 9 knots. Every time we took her out people marveled and asked to come aboard for a tour. She was the centerpiece at every port. She stole the show," he said, delighting in the memory.

Tore talked briefly about his time as a navy commander and then steered the conversation into calmer waters. "Once I retired, I had all the time in the world to take long cruises. I have so many good memories of times spent with family and friends while visiting every port along the bay.

In earlier years, *Sea Chanty* was a party boat where friends often gathered. For several years, the yacht was docked along Magothy River on Dobbins Island, a seven-acre island with a colorful past. Locals often refer to it as Dutchship Island, because legend tells of an 18th century Dutch ship that wrecked there below the dramatic limestone cliffs. "It was a great weekend destination for party boats. I met my wife Trish there" Tore said adding that they've been married for 33 years. Shortly after, the couple moved to the Eastern Shore.

He shared memories of times in Annapolis, docked on Ego Alley at the foot of Main Street. "There's nothing like kicking back and partying with friends while sitting by the water at sunset. One year, on St. Patrick's Day, a band got up on the bow and played," he said. And a *must* for Tore over the years has been cruising to the Italian Festival in Baltimore which features the traditional food and music of his youth. "My parents were from Italy. I'm a first generation American, and I always look forward to the festival."

One of his favorite ports is Tilghman Island, a quaint destination on the Eastern Shore where he and Trish enjoy the taking in the scenic views and dining on the water. "Half of the fun is getting there and back, especially when it's shared with good friends," he said. Troy and Gwen Vogel of Arnold, whose boat *Tranquility* is docked a few slips from *Sea Chanty*, are among those

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friends. Troy recalled last summer when they joined the couple for a cruise to the island for the annual watermen's festival. "He captained

Sea Chanty

like an 18-year-old. He was up and down without a second thought about what needed to be done. And anytime his boat leaves the dock, he's dressed in his whites and wears his captain's hat. He also puts out a signal flag," he said.



Tore's wife Trish joined us in the salon where we continued our chat. She mentioned the captain's interest in the *Titanic*, the British liner that sank in the Atlantic Ocean after colliding with an iceberg in 1912. She noted the picture he painted of the doomed liner, gracing the wall in a gold frame. "I've always been fascinated with the *Titanic*, not only its marine history, but also the clothing of that era and the simplicity of life back then. I wish I could have been around for it," he expressed.

Trish talked about the days when Tore's buddies often helped him work on the yacht. "They've all passed on. He's made plaques to commemorate their service to the boat," she said. "Tore still comes out almost every day. I pack him a lunch, and he's usually at the dock by mid-morning. He works off and on, takes a nap, watches TV, works some more, and he's home by four. He has put his love into the boat for so many years, but it's getting ahead of him. I've been wanting him to sell it for quite a while, but it's his life. So much of his heart is in this boat," she expressed. "There's a picture of him standing on the dock, looking out at *Sea Chanty*. That picture captures it all."

Tore was quick to admit that *Sea Chanty* has kept him going all these years. "She's been a great friend, but it's time ...," he said as his voice trailed off. "The kids are grown and have their own interests." He hopes to find a buyer who will be committed to his beloved yacht and give her the attention she deserves. Meanwhile, he plans to nurture her like the old friend she's been - a friend who has gifted him with great memories.

Sea Chanty is seaworthy and comfortable. All she needs is a fresh coat of paint - a task that Tore and Trish plan to tackle in a few days. Soon, the yacht will shine with the pride of her heydays.

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Tore is widely known for his youthful spirit, and he's respected on the Eastern Shore and beyond for his knowledge and passion of the sea. His dockmate Troy is among the captain's great admirers. "I've been at the marina for nine years and have watched him maintain his boat with such commitment and passion. It's a nice boat, and the level of dedication he has for her is amazing. It's like they're part of each other, take care of each other," he expressed.



Tore's dock mates emphasized the way the captain brightens the marina with his contagious smile. "We affectionately refer to him as the old man. It's been such a joy getting to know him. It wouldn't be the same around here without him," said Troy.

By the time I left the marina, a few boaters had returned from a summer-day cruise. A brood of wild geese honk-a-lonked overhead. As waves lapped against *Sea Chanty*, I could smell the potent bouquet of her history, sense the dance of her lively past. Looking back, I watched the captain take the polishing cloth from his pocket. Slowly, he began varnishing a small section of wood, over and over, as if he was polishing his memories into the shine of a lifetime.