

The 1980s



Bill Shore—2-Time World Champion and 6-Time North American Champion

There was a period of time in ILCA history where nearly every month in the Flashes the same headline could have been printed for months on end—"Bill Shore wins..." because, for a period of time, Bill was winning nearly everything he sailed in: Savannah and Miami—6 times each, NAs—6 times, Worlds—twice, Southern Circuit—3 times. The list goes on. Add to that the talented individuals that Bill mentored and his contributions to the growth of Class are immeasurable.—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

My brother, Doug, and I started racing in the six Optimists Prams that we built with our Sea Explorer Troop in middle school. We graduated to the locally built Turn-about Class, which was the first boat we learned to race. We constructed Lightning number 7709 from the ground up including spars and rudder in our garage in Amesbury, Massachusetts with the help from our dad. We suffered from being big fish in the Turn-about Class and becoming tiny fish at the bottom in the Lightning Class.

Who did you sail with? Was your family involved?

Once college finished and we completed our active duty military requirements, we ordered a new fiberglass Allen Lightning, number 10036, and found ourselves suddenly near the top of the New England District fleet. Our younger sister, Janet, handled the middle of the boat.

What venues did you most enjoy?

Our first Lightning sailing was done in the very strong tidal currents of the American Yacht Club on the banks of Merrimac River in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Later, we raced out of the Boston YC in Marblehead for a few years and, then, out of our garage trailer to ocean bays, harbors and small lakes around beautiful New England. Our favorite New England venues were Marblehead with its 300-boat Marblehead Race Week, Annisquam Yacht Club, Cape Ann with its wonderful wooded surroundings, and little Sandy Beach Yacht Club in picturesque Rockport, Massachusetts.

Who was your big competition racing in that era?

Our best competition in New England back then was Dr. Lou Pocharski, Senator Ben Smith, Len Pratt, John Collins, and Dick Price. Stuart Nickerson and Don Brush were just starting out. We had a lot of fun racing against all these legends.



What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

Winning the North Americans after winning our first Worlds gave us the feeling that we could be near the top of the Class for as many years as we wanted.

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

I truly believe that the Lightning Class was the best place to start my serious sail racing adventures. It opened a lifetime of competitive racing for me. It provided the foundation for my high-profile racing events like the Olympics and America's Cups.

What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

I don't think of the things I have done in the Lightning Class as significant contributions. The Class gave me a lot of growth and I have returned the favor by giving seminars, lectures, extensive coaching, and always being available in the parking lot to talk about everyone's ideas for making the Lightning go quicker and developing their skills.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

A good team atmosphere racing a Lightning is a plus, but it is not imperative to winning. It's actually more important on other boats such as Olympic classes and America's Cup campaigns where the programs are very long and intense. My crews (especially the Betsys) would say that this attitude is why I yell at my crew so much. I would retort that I yell because they are too slow to see what is happening. Now that we are all older, I realize that the yelling isn't really necessary, and they weren't really too slow. But, I would never tell them to their faces. Anyway, they would admit that I always made them better sailors, whether from fear or knowledge.

**Chat about the juniors programs you've been involved with and the Lightning Junior NAs. Add your suggestions for developing young Lightning sailors.**

My first response to the question about impact on the junior program in the Lightning is to think I wasn't involved in it. Then, I realize how many kids I have grown through the Class. I think I ran a mini-Junior program through the 1960s and 1970s. Mark Bryant, Jay Lutz, Greg Fisher, Ken and Brad Read, Terry Hutchinson, Betsy Alison, and Cory Sertl were all young and said they admired my ability and toughness. I think they really just liked our loaner program and significant discounts for younger competitors. Later, Betsy Altman and I crewed for Andy Horton, tying Greg Fisher for second in the Lightning NAs in Detroit (and finishing third on the tiebreaker).

What is the strangest thing you ever saw while sailing?

The strangest thing I've seen while sailing a Lightning is a windy day in Savannah when lots of boats capsized all around the course, and the sailors were walking around in the mud trying to right them. That course is truly the most fun we have in Lightnings.

What is the best event socially?

The Lightning Class Southern Circuit is the best social event.

What is the regatta you will never forget?

Our first blue fleet NAs would be the most memorable. It was in Chicago when we capsized during a windy reach to reach planning jibe in the last race while leading the event by a bunch of points. We lost that one but we knew then if we stayed with the Lightning we'd win a few NAs.

Who is the biggest pain in the neck for you on the course?

The biggest pain in the neck on the course was the guy who taught me most about sailing a Lightning, Tom Allen Sr. Tom gained my further admiration for having a heart attack in Savannah while doing really well in a race near the finish line. Dr. Sam Murray saw his boat veer off course and jumped aboard in less than 30 seconds to help revive him, while his young crew sailed as quickly as they could for the club.

Having been a "Champ," what's next?

I honestly don't know how many Lightning Worlds and NAs I have won, but I have tried very hard to win all that I've attended. Today, I am thrilled to help coach sailors who are rigorous in their approach and really want to learn more. I revel in their achievements and believe that I have helped to shape the future of our sport through their involvement.

What is the race you will never forget?

The first North Americans race we won was in Chicago. We saw a 30-degree wind shift to the right from the flags and smoke on the shore. Just before the warning gun, we saw the windward mark moved a bit to the right. After the start, we tacked to the right, picked the shift first and won by 100 yards.

How have your crew contributed to your success?

Bonnie Shore was the best reaching spinnaker trimmer ever. Giselle Wagner was the best compass reader/shift picker. Mark Bryant was the best all-around crew and could fix anything on the boat before you really knew it was broken. Hoss Bone, a dedicated and a strong teammate; Ken Read was the best tactically. Betsy Alison was the best at tactics and strategy. Hal Walcoff was the best hiker and most enthusiastic crew. Cory Sertl was clever with the tactics and very pleasant to be on the boat with. Betsy Altman was the best compass reader, running spinnaker trimmer, and was great at a party. Terry Hutchinson was the best tactician and hiker. Ann Brush was the most quiet crew I've ever raced with, was a very good hiker, and was fun to have on the boat. I was always the most proud when I raced with my son, Randy.

What other hobbies or sports do you participate in?

Is there life after sailboat racing? Sail racing is fun but I've learned to have a healthy balance of it and other activities. I began road racing motorcycles at age 55, and soon won a few American Motorcycle Association National Championships against hundreds of kids in their 20s. It is a very thrilling sport when raced on the track. My children ride motocross bikes (Jennifer 15 and Jonathan 14 and some times Randy, who is now a papa, too). Jonathan is ranked the top motocross kid in the Northeast and attracts good sponsorship as a result of his skill.

Top 10 Lightning sailors of all time?

Bruce Goldsmith, Mario Buckup, Tom Allen, Tito Gonzales, Richard Bertrum, Mark Bryant, Larry MacDonald, Jim Crane, Ched Proctor, George, Matt and Greg Fisher, Jay Lutz, Stu Nickerson, Bob Seidelman, and Jody Swanson Starck.

Best downwind racers?

Mario Buckup, Jim Crane, Don Brush, Dave Curtis, and Betsy Alison. I love going downwind. I learned a lot from these experts and they learned from me, too.

Most innovative?

Tom Allen and Mark Bryant. They are both forever thinking about how to make things work better, faster and more efficiently.

Most competitive Lightning regatta ever?

'85 Worlds at Little Egg Harbor.

Other than Lightning racing, what adventures have you had with other Lightning sailors?

I've have lots of fun with many other Lightning sailors racing all kinds of boats all over the world. Most memorable though, were events that we didn't sail. I've done many skiing weekends in Vermont with large numbers of ILCA members. I worked with John McIntosh Sr, and son, John, during the four years up to, and including the Savannah Sailing Olympic Games. They put on the show and I brought the US Olympic Sailing Team. It was so much fun working with them.

Interview by Mark Bryant



Matt Fisher—2-Time North American Champion

Who was the youngest North American Champion, who also won a Pan Am Gold medal, has been a 5-time NA runner-up and 2-time NA Champ? Yep. It's Matt. Here's the thing about Matt. His work schedule is so crazy that it's impossible for him to find time to sail or practice but then he shows up at these major events and just kicks butt. It must be in the genes. Natural talent.

—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

I started sailing Lightnings when I was very young. My dad sailed Lightnings since, like, 1946. We had a cottage at a small lake about 30 miles east of Columbus, Ohio, called Buckeye Lake. There were about 10-12 active boats in the fleet and it was a very competitive group. My dad got both, my brother and I, involved in sailing at a very young age, and got us our own Lightnings at the age of 12. He has been a great coach, and made the sport very easy for us to love.

Who did you sail with? Was your family involved?

When I was about 7 or 8 years old, my brother and I would alternate races sailing with my dad on Sunday afternoon fleet races. Fleet racing was a big deal then, and there were a lot of good people in the fleet. My brother got his own Lightning when he was 12 and I was then 10. I started sailing with Jim Dressel and did so for about 2-3 summers. We had 4-5 guys in the Buckeye Lake Fleet at that time that sailed in the Blue Fleet at the NAs. 20 years later the fleet still had very good racers, but we were having trouble getting consistent activity on weekend races because everyone was traveling. For the Worlds in New Jersey, we actually had 4 boats from our fleet racing, and a 5th skipper crewing for another.

What venues did you most enjoy?

When I was growing up, there were always two places where we really loved to sail. The first was Cleveland Yacht Club. It was a great venue, on and off the water. It seemed like we usually had two regattas a year at Cleveland. For some reason, everyone in our fleet loved sailing on Lake Erie. Our home lake wasn't really a small inland lake in our opinion. It is about five miles long and runs east and west so prevailing wind out the west/southwest kicked up some pretty big chop, actually making it feel like Lake Erie. On Sunday afternoons there were speedboats that doubled the size of the waves, literally. Those waves helped make our fleet pretty good big lake sailors. Cranky, but good big wave steerers. So, our fleet would go to CYC and seemed to enjoy sailing on the lake.

There were some very fun people at CYC like the Mueller family and many others who were, or were going to be related to the Muellers. The Cleveland people raised the level of partying at regattas to a height we had not seen before. It was a lot of fun, and they made sailing fun for many people. It was really the center of sailing of Ohio in the 70s.

The other location that was and still is my favorite place would be the Buffalo Canoe Club. When I was about 13 or 14, we started going to the Niagara Frontier Regatta, which was a big event then, and still is. Many top people in the Class came to the regatta, and many of the top people were from the Canoe Club. When I was talking about four or five people from our Buckeye Lake fleet often qualify for the blue fleet at the NAs, at the Canoe Club there would be four or five people who were past North American Champions. There was always a mystique about the place for the first couple of years that I went. The people from the Canoe Club were always a little faster, or could point higher. Our entire family really liked the entire place—the club, the sailing, the people, it was special to go there. We later won a couple NAs there, and I sailed with Ned and Joe, so we practiced in Buffalo quite a lot in 1992 and 1993. Back then, I was half adopted by the Starck family and felt like the Canoe Club was a second home. It is still a special place for us to go.

Who was your big competition racing in that era?

I started sailing in the era where Tom Allen, Bruce Goldsmith, Jim Dressel, Jim Crane, Carl Eichenlaub, and Bob Siedleman were the top people in the Class. I obviously wasn't their top competition when we first got started. This group dominated the top five of NAs and Worlds in the 60s and 70s. When we won the NAs in 1977, a lot of these guys were in the top 10, so I look back at that time of that group still being on top of their game. Tom Allen won the Worlds that year; Bill won the Worlds a few years later, so they were still in their prime. Back in the 'old days', the top ten seemed a lot faster than the rest of the fleet compared to what they are now. Maybe it is just me. I think that changes like the adjustable

backstay, and by-the-book-tuning has made boat set up more equal, and everyone is much closer in upwind boat speed. Downwind, we had tight reaches and when I was very young, that were very challenging for light crews. Bill Shore came up with a spinnaker that gave him a 10–20 boat length advantage each reaching leg. We don't have that anymore, but the caliber of people in the 10–40 places is a lot higher.

What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

The easy answer for that question is the Pan Am Games in 1991. We wanted to win the trials and the regatta very badly. I did horrible at the previous Games and really wanted it back. The Pan Am Games are a very, very long regatta—a marathon over eight or nine days. What was somewhat interesting also, was that we weren't that fast at the regatta in Cuba, or I am not that good at sailing in small fleets (8). We had been very fast up to that point during the entire year, leading up to the Games—in the Worlds in Annapolis, the Canadian Open, and other regattas. But, for whatever reason, we were mediocre upwind and really had to work hard. That win also had a strong level of finality for us. There was nothing hanging when that was done. It seems like I have won some very goofy North Americans before, and I have sometimes complained (quietly) at other North Americans where there may be a couple goof races. But, the Pan Ams were nine days of 15–20 out of the same direction. The biggest shift may have been 12 ½ degrees. When you are fast, those regattas are almost easy. When you are not, they are tough.

But, the regattas that I have treasured the most were even longer ago, and do make me feel old, but the other guys could feel older. Both regattas took place in the same year, 1976 and one was the Ohio Districts, and the other was the Niagara Frontier. That is 30 years ago, and I am beginning to feel, and sound like my grandfather. I think breakthrough regattas are when you beat people who have consistently won major regattas and whom you hold in very high regard. For the Ohio districts, we beat Jim Dressel, Jack Mueller, and some other tough people in Ohio. The Niagara Frontier we beat Bill Shore, and all guys in the Canoe Club who have won so many NAs. As I answer this, I feel like I am blacking out or just can't remember any non-Worlds or NA regattas between 1978 and 1991. But I remember those two regattas very clearly, and remember how we felt afterward.

When was your first race that you won in the NAs?

We won the NAs in 1977 with my dad and did not win a race. In 1978, I had the same team, and we won the second race. It was a great feeling, but it is also an interesting story, and funny to my dad and I, at least. In the first race, Bill Shore was winning, and we were in fifth at the last leeward mark. It was blowing about 15 in Rehobeth, a typical, summer afternoon thermal. At the mark, our bottom gudgeon broke, and the tiller just laid down on the deck with the rudder at an angle, since we were using only one gudgeon. Since we didn't want to shear off the entire rudder, we didn't want to tack more than one time, so we one-tacked the beat and laid the finish on starboard, and lost about 3 or 4 boats finishing in 9th, I think. We honestly thought we were done for the day, but we had a 9th, so that was a counter. But, with three fleets, and a friend in a power boat, my Father volunteered to get on the boat to borrow a gudgeon from a local fleet boat at the Rehobeth Yacht Club. It would be probably a 3–4 mile boat ride into the Yacht Club. I honestly remember thinking this is a waste of time, but we dropped our sails and drifted back to the starting line.

A little segway to the story is that I will be the first to admit that I am not the biggest handyman with tools. My brother is outstanding with rigging boats and enjoys that aspect of the sport. He did not inherit that from my dad. He got it from my uncle. This type of thing skips a half of the brothers in the family line. So the thought of my dad going in on a hot windy day, finding a Lippincott with the same gudgeons taking a screw driver and asking someone to help with a wrench, removing the gudgeon, putting all the nuts back on the screws so you don't lose them. I can't envision this happening. I laugh aloud right now thinking of my dad doing this with a windy race about to start. I mean, we have trouble screwing rubrails on in our garage. So we drift down to the starting area, and anchor about five boat lengths from the committee boat, and see my dad and the powerboat on the horizon. He got on our boat with what turned out to be about 15 minutes before the gun. I remember being very worried about dropping the gudgeon in the water and losing it. Jack Mueller sailed by and told us to put a line through the hole to keep from losing it in the water. It was getting windier, and very difficult to put this thing on with waves, water coming in, and just lack of coordination with tools between two unskilled people. But, we got it on. I can't see us doing this in the parking lot today, without calling over either my brother or Tom Allen Jr. We raised the main with about four minutes to the start, started well, went to the left very fast (a good gudgeon) and won the race by two minutes. I remember rounding the mark with a small lead, and getting on a plane, and stretching out to a minute or so at the leeward mark while everyone fought high. It was the first race either my dad or I won in the NAs. It was great.

One final sub note to the story is that the boat that my dad borrowed the gudgeon from had not been sailed all year. By the way, we did put the gudgeon back when the regatta was over. The gudgeon had cobwebs and rust on it. But, on this particular day in late August, the owner of the boat decided to take a sail with some people from his office. (I'm sure the guy had quite a drive, Rehobeth is a couple of hours

from DC) and put the boat in the water and didn't know why the rudder wouldn't stay up straight. It was one more aspect to the day that gave us a good laugh. The owner came up to us at the banquet, and actually, we had fun talking about it.

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

The Lightning Class has been the constant in my sailing, my entire life. I have sailed collegiately, and in other classes, but the Class has become extremely strong and is in better shape now than at anytime before. It is truly an International Class, and that is very important. The Class has been constant, but it has continued to change. I have not been active in the last couple of years but will get back into the boat soon. I have been impressed because it seems to always have adapted to change that was necessary to make improvements to make things more even, safer, or more attractive.

We talk about changing the boat, but really not much has changed in the last 20-25 years. Our set up on the boat is nearly identical to what we had in Seattle in 1984. You couldn't say that for the previous 25 years. The boat has changed to be better, whether it be fiberglass boats, aluminum masts, self-rescuing boats, adjustable backstay, and now very well-made new boats. The boat has changed when necessary, and our Class is strong because we can talk about making improvements. But, what the Class appears to be doing now is aggressively reaching out to more people to provide training and accessibility to improve boat handling and tactical skills and boat set up. That wasn't common 25 years ago, and is common for regattas now. The sailmakers and boat builders are very engaged with the success of the Class, and that is very good. I don't think it was as common 25 years ago, and if it was, it just seems more so now. But, the changes in how aggressively the Class is managed are impressive. I have been away, but I read the web updates at major regattas and stay in touch with what is evolving in the Class.

What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

I was on the Executive Committee for a couple years, but I don't know if that is my greatest contribution. I think I have been an 'example' for some good attributes of the Class. And, not by my doing, but maybe by others. First, I think we did a lot for junior sailing as a family. This is to my dad's credit. My brother and I became part of the Class, and part of the active sailors who were having a good time and sometimes, doing well. We were very young, and I am sure that more than a couple other parents or Lightning leaders (like Jim Carson) got kids sailing and steering more, and it became more common for juniors to sail. I realize that there were many, very young people sailing and doing well before my brother or me. Jim Crane, Steve Backman, and many, many others sailed in large regattas at young ages. But, I believe we had an impact as young people who could be active in the Class and sometimes do well.

Another contribution that may have not been so good, but might have been good at the time (this is an 'example' of not being in control, but having an impact on the outcome) was winning in an old boat in the late 70s. Bill Shore did the same thing. On one hand, I personally should have bought a new boat earlier than I did, because by 1984 they were very well made. But, many people got into the Class because they could enter at a very reasonable price and be competitive. So young people (other than Bill and Stu Nickerson) would buy these old boats since they figured if we could win in one, they could.

I also think I set an example for a non-'pro' who could win against the people who were in the boat business. Believe me, the people in the business make this Class very strong, and we are lucky to have the group we have had and have now. They make the Class strong in many ways. And, to answer another question, these people love the sport and the Class. The Class is better because of the builders and sailmakers we have. I never really say I want to beat the people in the business, but it seems to have motivated some other people several years ago.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

The team atmosphere is the most important part of being on a Lightning. I am relatively intense on the boat, and if I do not connect with one or two of my teammates, there is no fun, and minimal performance. The people who I have had as teammates would know that when we are a team and we are connected on how we are getting around the course, it is a great experience. I have been blessed with outstanding teammates in major regattas. Joe and Ned, Rob and Abby, my brother and Joyce, Steve Callison, and Ric and Dan. When I list these people it may sound like I can't keep people around; but they would each say I am tough, but that they felt a big part of the strategy and tactics and knew that we would do well because of a team. When it became just me making all the calls, we would do crappy, and not have fun. I really don't like sailing single-handed. I start talking to myself and get bored.

Chat about the juniors programs you've been involved with and the Lightning Junior NAs. Add your suggestions for developing young Lightning sailors.

Whether someone is a junior or a new sailor, it is most important to love the sport. That may sound like "duh, of course," but it seems like there are still people who don't know what part of the sport they really enjoy. Whether it is being with the family, competing, sailing the boat, improving, being around people, or big parties. It could be all, part or some. But, I think you've got to like to sail.

I haven't been very good at getting my own kids involved in sailing, so I'm not an expert on this subject. My kids enjoy a couple of competing sports, like swimming and baseball, and I have always wanted them to be passionate about what they are doing, on their own. My brother and I didn't have to get convinced by my dad to like the sport. We loved it, and couldn't do enough of it.

I didn't grow up in as structured a Junior program as some areas, but with that said our club has had three Junior champions: myself, Willy Petersilge, and Mike Hein. The advice I would give a junior is that I think it is very important to sail with as good of a person in the Class as possible. If a junior wants to learn and grow, they need to alternate or at least spend some time sailing with one of the top people in the Class. I am very lucky to have sailed with first, my dad, but then next, with Jim Dressel. Attitude and strategy around the course are the key parts of sailing that people need to learn. New sailors are very fast these days.

What is the best event socially?

For our family, St. Petersburg Midwinters.

What is the regatta you will never forget?

The regatta that I remember practically every race in was the North Americans in 1992. We had bad races in race #2 and #3, but in the end, we won four races. I believe in my own wacko opinion that it is easier to win four races once you are basically out of it, rather than the first four races. But, that is between me and my therapist.

Anyway, on the days of races 4 and 5, it was blowing out of the east at the Canoe Club about 15-20. We won the first race, and in the second race, we were leading, and the course was two triangles. At the second weather mark, we had about a 4 boat length lead on Terry Hutchinson, and several others like Larry and Jim Crane were pretty close behind. Due to a recall, the blue fleet had caught up to last half of the yellow fleet. At this time, we had Ned Roseberry and Joe Starck sailing on our boat. We were pretty good in a breeze, and these guys were great competitors. So, we round the 2nd weather mark, and there are 40 boats from the yellow fleet in front of us, nearly all without spinnakers up. We were on a tight reach, planning pretty fast, and we were approaching what could be a very difficult situation since most of the yellow fleet was high, and we could get caught low.

So Ned and Joe, being from the Canoe Club were going to help direct traffic. One of the best rules we have in the Class is that at the North Americans, the quota for the hosting districts is doubled. Realistically, there are venues (like the Canoe Club) that could take everyone who participates in the Districts. Many of the people in the Yellow fleet were acquaintances of Ned and Joe, either being from BCC or close by. So the communication, in a relatively loud tone from Ned or Joe was varying by who we were approaching, based on age. "Mr. Jones, would you mind laying off a little so we could go by? Thank you. Hey, put just a little more boom vang on, there that looks good. Thanks." Then we would go by Mr. Jones. Then we would come up to one of the Canoe Club Juniors — "Johnny, get the &*#@ out of our way. Now!" I am not exaggerating. There were at least six boats, and I think there were three juniors and three masters. Hopefully, we didn't scare the juniors for life.

I don't know why this one sticks in my head, but we had a few years that we really had trouble getting races off due to weather. One was in Illabella, Brazil. I was sailing with Ned Roseberry and Joe Starck. We were spending a lot of time with our training partner, family and good friend, David Starck, who was sailing with Kevin and Jody Lutz. We sat on the water with no wind for I believe 3 full days. I am not a very patient person, but the conversations, dares, contests, that we talked about, I still tell stories to my kids about those days.

Interview by Mark Bryant



Matt Fisher, Jack Mueller, Jim Dressel, Bruce Goldsmith & Tom Allen, III



Mark Bryant—2-Time North American Champion

Every class needs someone who thinks "outside-the box". Mark has been that guy for decades. From his early success as a junior sailor sailing "Putt-Putt" out of the Buffalo Canoe Club, Mark has always been questioning how to do it better. Innovative, creative, non-conventional...that's the Mark Bryant way. At the family reunion we are all running because Mark is the guy lighting the barbeque with a stick of dynamite and then we all come back because...well it worked!!—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Why do you love sailing Lightnings?

I could write a book about my adventures of being a Lightning sailor for 40 plus years. It has been said that if you can win in a Lightning then you can win anywhere. That statement is true; many great Lightning sailors have sailed other boats, and have done very well. The boat is not easy to step into and do well. It takes time and dedication to the boat.

In your opinion, who is the best sailor to not win a North Americans or Worlds?

In the 60s, Stu Anderson. 70s, Jim Carson/Jim Dressel. 80s, Stu Nickerson. 90s, David Starck.

Who is the sailor you most like to race against and why?

Hands down, Larry MacDonald. He and I sailed against each other a lot all the way back to the mid seventies. Don't take me lightly on this guy. Behind that happy-go-lucky exterior there is one fierce competitor. There were many times that during a race we'd exchange some good laughs or pass a cig or cold beverage between boats. We did that stuff in really major events. In addition, all those races (some 500) we never got into a protest.

What is the biggest difference in Lightning Racing between the 70s and now?

During the 70s, there were more choices. There were five good boat builders and a half a dozen sailmakers. Choice is always good. In the early 70s, the Class went through a chaotic time with spars. I honestly remember major events where there were, wooden spars, tapered aluminum with jumpers (jumpers where a support at the upper hound area transferred from wood masts), untapered aluminum with an external sail track and then the new oval.

Now our selection is quite limited. Two boat builders (both quality), and three or so sail makers. The individual equipment supplier has seen better days.

Finally, the biggest difference is fleet racing. In the 70s, fleets of 30 plus boats were very common, not so today. On a more positive note, our juniors and next generation appear to be on the rebound.

What innovation do you see out there, that people could do now, within current Class rules, to make their boats go faster?

There are two specific areas. First, understanding sail shape needs a lot of work. There are very few who actually understand what their looking at. In defense of sail makers and any coaches, sail shape is by far a very difficult topic to teach, or understand. Many years of experience, with help, is the only way to improve.

The second is with the entire boat. Today, you buy an out of the box boat. Put together and go race. I guess that's OK if you're the greatest of all time. Years ago, Don Brush made great rudders. Strange shape, very light, and quality. I bought it, changed the shape and loved it. The Class says it's too light, and implements a weight of 8 pounds. I still have that blade, can't use it, but it is a piece of craftsmanship. Rudder shape—only a select few really get into going faster. Ched Proctor's boats are always prep to the max. If the 15' arc wasn't max, he would wet sand all the way through gel coat to get max. That was real dedication. Rigging, Bill Fastiggi has some very unique ideas that work. I keep my rigging very simple; it is an attempt to get my team's heads out of the boat.

What is the best regatta in terms of depth of talent, which you have participated in?

No question—the '85 Worlds at Little Egg Harbor. Participants were the previous five World Champs, the past six NA champs. That was by far the most competitive regatta I've ever sailed in. That's just the helms person. Now throw the likes of the crew in, and give me a break. Betsy Alison, Cory Sertl, Kip Hamplet, Rob Ruhlman, Jody Lutz, Brian Taboada, and too many others to mention. By far, the deepest, and most talented. What a great regatta.



1980 NA Champion

After the oval spar, what is the second most significant change the Class has seen?

There are many, wood boats to glass, steel boards to stainless, cotton to dacron, to whatever we use today. Really good trailers, you can't believe some of the junk we trailed down the road at 90. The biggest is with somewhat self-rescuing boats. Years ago, it was nearly impossible to right a boat, no less sail it out of a capsized. The boat is way safer.

How would the stars of Lightning sailing today stack up with the stars of the 70s?

Easy there, Greg Fisher is still around...well, so are a lot of us. Lets go this way:

Bruce Goldsmith vs Ched Proctor. Absolute draw...

night and day in approach and prep...Bruce would go golfing with a cold beverage, Ched would wetsand, rerig, and go sailing.

Tom Allen vs Tito (it's cool to go by one name). Both too talented. Both sneaky quick. You know they are there but it's like they have a cloaking device. I sailed against both in their prime: Tito gets the edge only because he consistently has better crew. I can't say that, because Tom's three Worlds in a row with Anne Allen and Larry Bone were special. That's pickin' 'em.

Matt Fisher vs Alan Terhune...that's not fair, or is it. Both very intense, and I mean, intense. Neither has outstanding speed but are NEVER SLOW. Designer sailors, sail by the book tactically, predictable but very tough to defend or beat. Very good match up—would be a fun match race.

Jim Carson vs Taylor Lutz. What a scene it'll be when Jim hands Taylor the big trophy. The kid has talent and a very fine teacher, but Jim is the teacher of many greats. Jim had back to back heartbreaking losses in '70 and '71 NAs. Youth versus experience. Gotta go with Jim, but the kid will win; it'll be fun watching this career blossom.

Talent is talent in any era. Today's sailors have a lot of advantages, i.e., coaching, better equipment. I think we had more freedom in the '70s and it was different racing, no 720, no throw outs, no Harken.

There are many personalities that have sailed and are sailing Lightnings.

Who is your favorite and why?

That's a tough one, only one, because over 40 plus years there have been so many...Bruce Goldsmith. He also had a single name (the Bruin) and only person I know to have a sail named after him. Bruce was/is a character and a great, great sailor. I had the opportunity to sail with him in Lightnings and Solings when I was 15 years old. What an experience on and off the water.

Who is the best boat handler you have seen?

Mario Buckup, hands down. His teams had technique that hasn't been duplicated, although, Linton's team is close. He's a great sailor, and an asset to our Class.

Who is the most influential person on your sailing ability?

Bill Shore...he taught me how to win and lose, made me think way too much. Bill is still coaching me and supporting my Paralympic campaign.

Who do you think has had the most impact on the Class, either sailing or supporting the ILCA organization?

Dave Nickels, Tom Allen, Jr, and Greg Fisher. In different ways, they have all been available to provide a service and support the membership.

When was the best period of time for racing Lightnings?

The early '80s. We had a lot of 'older guard' mixed with new blood: Tom Allen, Mario Buckup, Bill Shore, Ken Read, Dave Curtis, Jay Lutz, Larry MacDonald, Jim Crane, Manuel and Tito G plus the whole Fisher clan...that was a lot of talent.

Rank the 10 best Lightning skippers of all time.

Bill Shore, Tom Sr, Tito, Mario Buckup, Bruce Goldsmith, Matt Fisher, Mark Bryant, Larry MacDonald, Greg Fisher, Jay Lutz, Ched Proctor, Jim Crane.

All these sailors have great careers and at their time were by far the best. This is a top ten of only my forty years. Let the arguments/discussions begin. I've enjoyed my life in the Lightning Class.

Interview by Alan Terhune

The 1990s



Larry MacDonald—2-Time World Champion and 2-Time North American Champion

Over the last couple of years you may have noticed that navy blue boat out there with two kids crewing...yep, that's Larry and his kids. But make no mistake, Larry didn't just start teaching and sailing with the up-and-comers of the Lightning Class recently; rather, he has been mentoring and inspiring young sailors for decades now. As a junior, Larry was taught by his Dad, the great Larry Sr., who spear-headed the Youth World Championship for many, many years. These days you can find Larry sailing a club race or a world championship race with his kids, teaching them all the way around the course.—David Starck

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

I began sailing Lightnings when I was 13 or 14, sailing club races in Hamilton, as an occasional crew. When I was 16, my father bought a boat and I began practicing for the Jr. NAs and Jr. Districts. I sailed the Jr. Districts that year in Silver Lake and then the Junior NAs in South Carolina, and I was hooked.

Who did you sail with? Was your family involved?

I began my Lightning sailing with my father and junior crews. Dad would drive and pay for the events, and he helped train my junior crew. After a few years, my sister sailed with us, as well as my junior crew. Eventually, my sister got her own boat and Dad went to sail with her.

What venues did you most enjoy?

I have always loved sailing at the Buffalo Canoe Club, but I must say one of my favorite places to sail is Savannah. I also have a warm place in my heart for Indianapolis on the Geist Reservoir, where I sailed the spring regatta for a few years when I was young. I still remember kicking off the season; dad would drive both ways while I would sleep along with the other crew. We would drive all night Friday, and again most of the night Sunday to sail. It sure made for great memories.

Who was your big competition racing in that era?

My first regatta was a junior district at Silver Lake, and I came second to Mark Bryant. I raced for many years against Mark and he was 'the guy to beat' along with Jay Lutz and Matt Fisher. There were many others such as Shore, Allen, Goldsmith, Crane, Curtis, etc., but I always seemed to focus on the younger guys as the guys to beat.

What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

I have a number of treasured victories for different reasons. My first Canadian Open win with my dad was special, for both of us; my first NA victory with Ya and Trevor because it was a year long effort with that as the goal; my Worlds win with Ya and Jody, because the journey to get there was so much fun; and also the spring regatta in Toledo a few years back, winning my daughter's first regatta.

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

Being involved with the Lightnings has shaped my life. It exposed me to a group of people at the age where life can be confusing. The Lightning family has helped make me who I am. The racing has made me focus; taught me to make a plan, execute that plan, and then evaluate the result to formulate another plan until we arrive at success. It has been a great life lesson. Now, with my children involved, it is wonderful to see the same people help shape them. The Lightning Class is one of the few places that the kids are treated as peers and it has an enormous effect on their confidence.

What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

Perhaps focus on the youth, and trying to give as many as possible the opportunity to enjoy what the Class has to offer.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

Team is everything to success and enjoyment of this sport. I have sailed with some great teams, and wonderful people. Many have become my best friends and life long friends. It is strange that the team effort of trying to get this square boat around a race course, a little faster than everybody else, has the ability to bond people.



Chat about the juniors programs you've been involved with and the Lightning Junior NAs. Add your suggestions for developing young Lightning sailors.

I sailed four Junior NAs and the first Junior Worlds and thought these were great events. I believe strongly in developing younger sailors in the Class. I have been sailing with my kids as of late and am reasonably competitive with 10 and 12 year olds on the boat. Most people have been waiting to include kids once they reach 15 or 16, but I think we all should start earlier. The boat is conducive to a small crew member and now that we rarely reach, it is an advantage 75% of the time to be lighter. We need more kids at the regattas, because the social side is important, and once there is a group of kids sailing, the growth will take care of itself.

What is the strangest thing you ever saw while sailing?

That would be Bill Faude.

What is the best event socially?

When I was young, it was the fall regatta at Silver Lake, now it would be the Southern Circuit.

What is the regatta you will never forget?

There are many, but my first with my daughter, Joy, is way up there.



**Mario Buckup
1st Non-North American World Champion and
South American Champion**

I remember the day that I realized the world was round. Well, not really, just that it was big. 1975. News Flash! New World Champion. Mario who?? Is he from New York? Chicago? Brazil!! You mean a non-American won the Worlds! Wow! The ILCA really is an International Class, and it was Mario Buckup who opened up the floodgates. Now we are surprised when a US sailor wins the big one (what a difference 30 years makes) but Mario was our first international champion. At our reunion, Mario is the guy telling the story about how our family welcomed an 'outsider' into our ranks with open arms.—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

My father had a Lightning and won, once, our Nationals. Also, I always like better boats with crew instead of sailing alone. I like teamwork.

Who did you sail with? Was your family involved?

At the beginning, I sailed with my friends which ended to be my best friend, until now. Since around 1992/93, I began to sail a lot with my brother, and sometimes my younger son, Marc. Then, around ten years ago, I decided to sail with my wife, Telma, and Marc. At the beginning, they depended on me, but now I depend on them, so good they became!!! Telma on the spinnaker, and Marc on the jib and helping on tactics.

What venues did you most enjoy?

Even I work with sailing (North Sails and Boat Equipment). I enjoy very much all Lightning regattas, from small club races to Pan Am games (2), Worlds (many), NAs (Many), SAs (Very Many), etc...

Who was your big competition racing in that era?

To name some: Claudio Biekark, Bill Shore, Mr. Goldsmith, Tito and Manolo Gonzalez, Tom Allen, Paco Sola, Maspons Brothers, Andres Lisocki and many, many others.



What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

Two Gold Medals in Pan Am games plus one World Champ.

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

My life belongs to the Lightning Class.

What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

I'm trying to teach all what I learn in and out of the Class to those who want to know.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

Super important, if not fundamental!! A skipper alone will have serious difficulties to sail a lightning, without building teamwork with his crew.

Chat about the juniors programs you've been involved with and the Lightning Junior NAs. Add your suggestions for developing young Lightning sailors.

In Brazil, we have a good junior program. Interestingly, all Brazilian junior are interested in sailing Lightnings, once and from then on they love it. They even have other good classes, such as 420, Snipes, etc., in Brazil.

What is the strangest thing you ever saw while sailing?

Sailing in one of the American big lakes (I think Sheboygan), and even in a hot day there was fog on top of the lake because the water was so cold!! During one week, and another one: seeing small hurricanes coming in front of a cold front in Guaruja (Brazil)!!

What is the best event socially?

All social events are super important. I like them all!!

What is the regatta you will never forget?

One of the regattas I will never forget was at the lake San Pablo near Quito, Ecuador, and I was sailing with Telma (pregnant—6 months), and my friend Joaquim against Jim Dressel, Bill Shore, etc. . . The wind was strong and suddenly a stronger puff came in and we were the only ones to hoist the spinnaker. Joaquim was taking care of the jib and spinnaker and carrying Telma around the boat to not hurt her and the baby!! We survived and won the regatta!!



The 2000s



Jody Swanson
1st Female North American Champion and Youth World Champion

Well I think it's Jody Starck as I write this, but regardless, both last names are synonymous with success in the Lightning Class. Jody's talents seem limitless. She sails the Lightning in such a carefree and loose manner you wonder how is it possible for her to do it so effortlessly? Hopefully, married life and the new baby (Sabrina Ann, born May 1, 2006) will not slow Jody down, but then again, the only way I figure most of us can beat her is if she doesn't show up!!—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

I was very fortunate to grow up sailing with my family in the Lightning Class. We skied in the winters and sailed Lightnings in the summers. It was just what we did as a family. Good fortune comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes. This was my good fortune growing up.

Who was your big competition racing in that era?

Sometime you just get lucky. I had my family as well as a whole host of others to help me excel. Weekend club sailing brought me the likes of MacDonalds, Jones, Bryants, Stu Anderson, Allens, Starcks, Roseberys...out to race. Some incredibly valuable lessons were learned week in and week out in front of the BCC!

What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

Lightning Youth Worlds. It was my first international competition. It was a very big to even qualify, much less win the regatta. Looking back, it was one of the first times, my team and I set our goals, worked very hard preparing and actually saw the fruits of our labor. The regatta also opened many doors for me in years to follow!

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

The Lightning Class has been very gracious to me. It is partly responsible for my love and passion for the sport. It has provided me with some incredible opportunities and was always there to push me to become better, yet still provide the friendships and camaraderie to keep the sport fun.



What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

The biggest contribution any of us can make to the Lightning Class is promoting it among our peers. We are all responsible for the health of the Class, so introducing new people to the Class is a contribution we all need to make!

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

For me, the team concept is quite possibly the best part of the sport. Assembling a team is just another challenge in our sport. However, when done right, there is a special magic brought to the boat, providing the difference between first and second! In my opinion, the team makes or breaks a regatta, so I am often left wondering why the team doesn't receive more credit as a whole. In most cases, like mine, the skipper is left floundering without the constant backing of the team!

Interview by Mark Bryant



David Starck—Current World Champion Runner-up and Junior North American Champion

"Super Dave" is just that. Super. Oh sure he wins his share of regattas and is always on the leader board at every major event but that's not why he's "Super Dave" in my opinion. Whether he's co-chairing the NAs, winning the Southern Circuit or getting junior sailors hooked on our boat, David just bleeds Lightning sailing. He gets pumped up for it like no one I know. Going to Chile. David's pumped up. Weekend regatta at Cazenovia Lake. He's there! "Supe" would say the Lightning Class has given him a lot but we know it's the other way around. Now he and Jody have added another talent to the ILCA with the birth of Sabrina. Won't be too long before she's beating us all too!!!—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

Growing up at the BCC, all the best sailors were in the Class.

Who did you sail with? Was your family involved?

I sailed with Tom Ward; Larry MacDonald was really responsible for getting me involved in the Jr. Regattas. Yes, my entire family was/is very involved in the Class.

What venues did you most enjoy?

BCC, Key Biscayne, Savannah, Pymatuning

Who was your big competition racing in that era?

Larry, Mark Bryant, Tom Allen Jr., Jody (my wife, as a kid), Steve Hayden.

What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

1987 Junior NAs—it was so critical to me to win that regatta!

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

A lot. Many of my best friends are and continue to be sailing in the Lightning Class.

What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

Getting the fleet and the BCC back on track and getting the kids involved again. Today the fleet is very healthy and sound.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

The team chemistry is the difference between winning and losing. Period.

What is the best event socially?

Pymatuning Spring Classic

Who was your biggest pain in the side, whether speed, tactics, or just lucky?

Fastest—Matt Fisher; tactics/smarts—Larry.

The sailor you don't want to sail against when he/she is hot?

Tito.

Lets go back a couple of years and chat about the junior programs you've been involved with and the Lightning Junior NAs. Add your suggestions.

Once again, the BCC Juniors had a great tradition—it's the reason I'm working hard now to get it back!

Take us through the first time you led an NAs race, what the feeling was.

1992 in Buffalo. Too painful a regatta to reminisce...lost to Larry by two points.

The feeling of winning your first NAs race, this year?

I need to win the damn regatta—not just the race. It is a great feeling though.

What are your other hobbies ?

Tennis, running, ice hockey...all help sailing in various ways.

Is your family part of you sailing and how so?

Now more than ever...Jody!!

Dumbest thing you ever saw while sailing?

A pin end RC boat call boats over and NOT being anchored.

Strangest event you attended?

Grateful Dead Concert in Madison Square Garden.

Hardest loss to accept?

1992 NAs...a couple collegiate regattas come to mind...1990 Sloop Nationals.

Luckiest event you ever won?

1986 Navy Fall Invite D division Laser.

Best event—racing, non-Lightning?

J/24 Worlds...also, the Pan Am trials.

Regattas you would like to forget?

2006 St. Pete.

Regattas you will never forget?

2005 Worlds in Chile.

We took your magic wand away, but if you could change anything on a Lightning, what would it be?

Rudder design and centerboard material.

Lets go to amateur vs pro. Who has more love for the sport of sailing?

Same.

Is there a difference?

No.

Interview by Mark Bryant



Greg Fisher—North American Champion

Greg Fisher has a major flaw. He's too nice. There, I said it. While our class has it's share of dominating champions who have won their fair share (and then some) of major regattas Greg is the guy who is likely to have made more of an impression on you than many of the names you read about in the Flashes. Don't get me wrong. Greg has won a ton of Lightning regattas (NAs, Southern Circuit, St. Pete) but those are just the ones he has won while on the boat. But you see Greg's flaw is that he wants to help other people win almost (I said, almost) as much as he wants to win himself. You're as likely to see Greg tuning a competitor's boat while the fleet sails out to the start as you are to see him on the winner's podium. Maybe he'd have won a few more "big ones" if he hadn't helped the guy with his mast rake or his jib leads but he can't help himself. He's too nice. And we like him just the way he is.

—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

My dad was very involved with sailing and Lightning racing. My brother and I started racing with him at a young age. I think I was 6 or 7, and Matt was around 5. We went to all the regattas with my dad and mom, and it was a very family-oriented activity for us.

What venues did you most enjoy?

At that time, any of the ones that had a beach! Buffalo, Pymatuning.

What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

For sure, the NAs in 1977. My brother won with my dad as crew. I was second behind him. Second most memorable regatta, though, was the Worlds in Miami where I crewed for my dad and we were sixth—part of the event, we led!



What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

Many friendships have come as a result from the Lightning Class. For our family, it has long been the common denominator.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

It is everything...without the right 'chemistry' it's not fun, and we won't do as well. For me, it is more important to sail with someone I have a great time with than one who is the very best sailor.

The most consistent sailor, which is always there, but never wins.

Jim Dressel had, over the years, been second in the NAs numerous times. He won St Pete a couple of times but he was always super consistent.

Please add what different teammates have offered.

Sailing with Joann and Jeff Eiber (who I've sailed with for 23 years) has always been a solid team and fun. They communicate well together and paint the 'picture' of the racecourse well for us, so together, we can make the best tactical and strategic decisions. Joann, when she is 'on' and confident is one of the very best tacticians anywhere, I feel. Brian Hayes has always been a great talent to sail with, too! Tactically, he is very strong. He and I have always worked well together both on and off the racecourse.

Lets go back a couple of years and chat about the junior programs you've been involved with and the Lightning Junior NAs. Add your suggestions.

We sailed the very first junior NAs in Cleveland. My brother won and we were second (sound redundant?!). It was a great time as there was lots of talent sailing—Mark Bryant, Jay Lutz, to name just a couple.

I think this event is key for future Lightning growth. It is important that it continues to receive the effort it does today to make it a strong event. Making sure as many of the hot kids in other classes, outside the Lightning Class, are invited and have boats available would be great press and an opportunity to bring even more kids into the Class.

Take us through the first time you led an NAs race, what the feeling was.

It was '77 and it was unbelievable. At the time, I was surprised but excited that we were there!

Is your family a part of your sailing and how so?

My family is all about sailing. My wife, Joann, sails with me as much as her work schedule allows, and I enjoy crewing for her. She is very talented in her own right. She was third in the NAs a few years back. My daughter, Martha, sails with us a lot, or her buddy Maegan Ruhlman. Lightning sailing is special for her as well...her strings of friends all sail Lightnings! I still enjoy sailing with my dad and look forward to the next event. Martha and I have crewed for him several times and it really doesn't get much more special than that! Talk about team chemistry!

Interview by Mark Bryant





Tito Gonzalez—4-Time World Champion and South American Champion

"Numero Uno". That pretty much sums it up. Let's take a look at his results last year: Lightning World Championships—1st, Etchells World Championships—1st. That does it for me—two of the toughest one design classes in the world (assuming you think the Etchells is tough), and Tito goes and wins them both. Oh yeah, he has won the Lightning Worlds something like four times now. The only real question right now is—who's number 2??—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

Because my father had a boat; he invited me to sail with him when I was 13.

Who did you sail with? Was your family involved?

The first 5 years in the Lightning Class, I crewed together with my brother while my father was the skipper. Then, my father bought two Lightnings and my brother and I started our own team with friends.

What venues did you most enjoy?

Always the ones that are challenging; heavy winds have been always my favorite ones. I remember Puerto Rico, a bay where we sailed Pan Am games in 1979. Big waves and 20 knots plus everyday. Another good place to sail is Con Con, Higuierillas, Chile, where we sailed the Lightning Worlds 2005.

Who is your big competition racing?

At the beginning, the South American competition was Mario Buckup from Brazil. Internationally, there were many great sailors like Bill Shore, Matt Fisher, Jay Lutz, Larry MacDonald, to mention a few.

What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

To me, all the victories have the same sweet taste because all of them are hard to win.

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

It's been more than I can say in one book, it is part of my life and the Lightning is deep in my heart because it gave me such a great time, experience, and the opportunity to know friends and countries around the world.

What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

I gave it back my best competitive sport spirit ever.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

This is the most important question you have done today. Even before the regatta has started I already know, only because the atmosphere factor, if I have a good chance to win. In other words, I have won only when I got good feelings with my crews; and always when I had even a small issue with one of them, the final results are poor.

What have other teammates of yours contributed?

Some of them, like German Schact, offered extremely strong physical conditioning, which turned out to be unbeatable in heavy air. Other sailors like Jay Lutz or Terry Hutchinson gave the strategy at an expert level.

The most consistent sailor, which is always there, but never wins?

These days, Dave Starck.

Having been a CHAMP, what is next? Can you just hope to win another or do you work at it?

As long as I have the desire, I will keep working as hard as possible to try to win again.

Let's go back a couple of years and chat about the juniors programs you've been involved with. Add your suggestions.

I never had a junior program in the Lightning Class. I sailed sabots from age 8 to 13 without any coach, but all summer, everyday, I had a lot of fun sailing inside the bay rounding the boats and marks close to the beach.

Other hobbies?

I ride mountain bikes, play tennis, winter ski, and I go to the gym once per week all year round.

Is your family part of your sailing and how?

My father and my brother are life long sailors, and now my older son, Diego, is training to go to China for the Olympic Games. I hope my younger son, age 11 now, will be involved in the sport.

Interview by Mark Bryant



Betsy Alison—Multi-Time Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year

Betsy (Gelenitis) Alison—deeds unprecedented—that's the only way to detail her accomplishments. The list is longer than space permits. For a few, try five-time Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year, three-time Adams Cup Champion, Multi-winner International Womens Keelboat Championship, US Womens Match Racing Champion, Laser Womens World Champion, Yngling Worlds Champion not to mention Lightning victories including Womens North American Championship and a team member for Lightning Worlds, North Americans, and Southern Circuit victories. All this and more from the girl that cried when she was first introduced to junior sailing. Now sailor, teacher, friend, and ambassador of the sport—unprecedented talents—giving back to the sport that has earned her international recognition.—Jim Carson

How did you get into Lightnings and why?

Back in the early 70s, Jim Carson and Dave Ruiter from Metedeconk River YC started offering 'advanced classes' in Lightnings to juniors (selected by resume application) that were moving out of established sailing-class format. By teaching weekly classes in loaner Lightnings (fleet sailors), we all learned valuable skills like compass use, tactical and strategic analysis, advanced spinnaker technique, teamwork, etc. The Class culminated each season with a Junior Championship regatta for the Junior Club Champion, and all of the participants in the teams were from the advanced class. Not only did this keep us active and interested, it provided a ready, willing and ABLE group of 'crew' for the fleet sailors. Pretty smart, eh? Through this channel, many of us then were skilled enough to be able to 'borrow' boats to sail in the Junior NAs and then stay on to crew in the big show.

What has this Class done for your sailing, as a coach, sailor, and World Class sailor?

The Lightning Class is a very friendly, family-oriented Class. I was able to sail with family and friends for a long time. It is a Class that has a lot of talent and depth in it, all across the age spectrum. This Class provided me with the opportunity to experience top-level competition at a local, regional, national, and international level at a very early age (in my teen years), and it helped me to grow as a sailor as I explored many opportunities in the other classes and disciplines. The Class has provided me with a great foundation. I draw from many of my experiences sailing with Class stalwarts like Bill Shore, Dave Curtis, Hale Walcott, Jud Smith, Tito Gonzalez, and many others when I am involved with my sailing projects regardless of whether they are my own racing programs, or in my coaching duties.

What was the difference of sailing with Dave Curtis vs Bill Shore or Mark Bryant?

Each person I have sailed with has brought to the table their own variety and style of demands, expectations, and personality. Dave Curtis was one of the most naturally talented people I have ever sailed with. I enjoyed learning from him to appreciate the gut feelings, the trusting of sensory perceptions, the rigors of a very precise and organized program. With Bill Shore, I particularly learned how to be much more analytical and technical in my thinking and approach to decision making—his intense demands warranted making quick yet calculated suggestions. Those years were very educational to me—culminating by winning a Worlds together in 1985. Mark Bryant—well, sailing with you was definitely a piece of work. You tended to be far more emotional than the others, determined and holding high expectations. We worked hard as a team to get the job done.

How would you rank the Lightning among all the boats you've sailed and why?

The Lightning will always be one of my favorites—a glorified square, flower box that you can hop in and out of without too much effort (though hiking hurts like mad). Even if you've been away, you will still be able to have a reasonable degree of success. Plus, the people in the Class is what makes being involved so enjoyable.

What influence did Jim Carson have on your life, outside of sailing.

In addition to his influence in getting me and my brothers involved in the Class, he has been a great personal friend to me and my family.

What did you do with all the watches, can I have one or do I need to earn it?

Of the five watches, I kept the first, and the fourth (it was different) and gave away the other three to people who have supported my program over the years and who have a tremendous impact on the resultant outcomes. BTW—you (Mark Bryant) need to earn yours.

Who was your toughest US lady sailor, i.e. Adams, etc.?

There are many female sailors that I have tremendous respect for that have provided plenty of challenges over the years. Jody Swanson, Sally Barkow, Marit Soderstrom of Sweden, Shirley Robertson of Great Britain, Marie Bjorling of Sweden. There are plenty more.

If you campaigned a Lightning full time, how good would you be? A Champ?

You are only as good as your last result shows, and I believe that if you spend enough time working at any task you can achieve great things. The challenge is to recognize what your strengths and weaknesses are, then capitalize on the strengths and convert the weaknesses into strengths. Then, you pay your money and take your chances—there are so many changing variables in sailing. The more time you can put into a well-planned effort, the higher the success rate. But, having an EFFECTIVE program is far more important than spending all day, every day, on the water.

Now that US Sailing has recognized your ability with disabled sailors, (Thanks Coach) what are you plans to achieve multiple Golds in China?

Since becoming the staff coach at US Sailing for the Paralympics disciplines, the focus and long term goal is to have podium finishes in all three classes. Maximizing our assets from athlete performances to resources is critical to making that happen. If we can help our athletes reach their potential in an effective and timely manner, and if the athletes that comprise our TEAM put forth their best efforts in training and competition, we will make the world 'take notice'.

Your most memorable moment in the ILCA?

I can only guess, '85 Worlds. Great job. Winning the Worlds in '85 (crewing for Bill Shore) was a definite highlight—but then again, so were the bonfires at the Junior NAs on the beach at Buffalo Canoe Club.

Interview by Mark Bryant



Matt Burridge—2005 North American Champion

What is not to like about Matt Burridge? He's your everyday, ordinary Lightning fleet racer from Lake Carlyle who, by the way, went out and sailed the pants off everyone in Sheboygan to win the 2005 NAs with a race to spare. Matt Burridge is exactly what's great about Lightning sailing. Get a great crew, practice a bit, have a plan, make sure you're having fun, sail against the best competition whenever you can and combine it all together and you end up filling up a tarnished silver bowl with champagne, sharing a sip with 200–300 of your new best friends and get called "NA Champ" the rest of your life. We need more Matt Burridges. Who's next?—Brian Hayes, ILCA Secretary

Please tell us about how you came to be involved with sailing a Lightning.

My dad bought a wooden boat #7503 when I was six. He thought it would be 'relaxing', but I am not sure if that meant sailing or maintaining a wooden boat. As soon as he learned you could race, the relaxation went out the window. I first crewed for him when I was eight, and did my first full NAs when I was 12 (raced 1 race as a sub the previous year, '71). Dad shared the helm with me when I was 13; we kept learning together through the '89 season, when he crewed for me in the Europeans in Athens (10th), he was 59.

Who did you sail with? Was your family involved?

I raced with my dad, Lal Burridge, and my mom would always go along and ask to work RC. I was privileged to sail with a wide range of distinguished teammates: Bill Shore, Bill Buckles, Mark Bryant, Rick Larson, Cully Ward, Phil Grotheer, Jim Carson, Don & Scott Zerban, Dan & Tobi Moriarty, Todd and Christine Wake. I am teaching my son, Patrick (10), to sail this year.

What venues did you most enjoy?

I loved Athens; Newport, Rhode Island; Pucon, Chile, Burlington and Mission Bay YC, each for different reasons but mainly because I felt as though I had these places moderately figured out, and they are beautiful venues.

Who was your big competition racing in that era?

I had great rivalries with Greg Florian, Steve Craig, and Larry MacDonald as a junior. As I aged out, I developed a very health rivalry with a master, Augie Paoli, who was a great light air sailor from Carlyle and probably taught me more about the nature of competition week in and week out than anyone, ever.

What is the victory you treasure the most and why?

The 2005 North American Championships in Sheboygan because we were dark horses, I trained very hard to overcome the common wisdom that I was 'way too old to win', yet we won by a healthy margin. Being able to do it with my best friends as teammates, and my parents watching at the same venue where I almost drown 29 years earlier was special.

What has the Lightning Class meant to you over your lifetime?

A life long set of friends. No matter where I go, if there is a lake and a Lightning fleet, I find I am welcomed. That is rare in this age.

What has been your greatest contribution to the Lightning Class?

Being ILCA Secretary for two years as we tried to infuse the Class with energy and enhance the stature of the Class internationally. It was very satisfying volunteer work.

How important to you is the team atmosphere on a Lightning?

The team is responsible for the result, and therefore, the atmosphere has to be right. Loose but attentive, mentally, is really good place for us to be, so we try to create the surroundings where that is the outcome. We have each done this Lightning racing thing a thousand times, and I think that helps us stay calm and in perspective. For my team that works well.



Who was your biggest pain in the side, whether speed, tactics, or just lucky?

For me, over the past 15 years, no question, Steve Hayden and Barr Batzer. They are very talented and make very few mistakes. We know them, like and respect them, and are constantly around them, for better or worse. Lately, worse for us. However, at the end of the day we can sit with their team and have a good laugh about what happened and why. That is a real treat in a competitive environment. They might say that we are a pain in their sides, too!

The sailor you don't want to sail against when he/she is hot?

The Class is so even right now that is almost impossible to answer. If I had to give a response it would be some mixture of Larry MacDonald and Tito Gonzalez in heavy air, Jody Swanson and Jim Crane in tight situations, Dan Moriarty and Bill Fastiggi in a flat water drifter, Bill Faude in a drag race, and Matt Fisher and Ched Proctor every other time and every other situation. They are all highly skilled, highly motivated, very clean and honorable competitors. Frankly, they are just plain better than me but that motivates me. I enjoy being the underdog with the old 'element of surprise' kind of thing. I know I've left myself open to a lot of second guessing with some very obvious omissions but the margins of differentiation are very small in the Class today. Every year, it seem like if any one of about 20 boats get hot, they can win the NAs, too.

The most consistent sailor, which is always there, but never wins.

Wow, I don't think I can answer that. By the time a boat makes the blue fleet, they really are winners, but maybe, just at a different stage of development. I'd rather say who I thought was the most consistent sailor whether they happen to win or not; Matt Fisher. In my opinion, he's the prototype of a smart, conservative style and that puts him consistently at the top in virtually regatta since he was a teenager. Considering the evolution of the tuning in the Class over this time, I think he has had the most consistent results.

Now that you are a CHAMP, what is next? Can you just hope to win another or do you work at it?

I work at it because I am a long-term goal driven sort of animal. That is just me. Right now I am just working to stay fit in the off-season and hopefully learn a few new things that are venue specific. I am lucky that I can still be as physically fit as I am, and am profoundly grateful. On the other hand, I study a lot of sailing videos (from '84 Olympic Games VHS through the current Volvo race streaming video). Although not much of what I see is Lightning sailing, maybe it just helps keep me sharp with sail shapes and conditions, etc. when I can't sail all the time. The mental visualization thing really works well for me. However, it does seem that the harder I work, the luckier we get.

Add in that Tobi and Dan may help...

With Dan and Tobi Moriarty as teammates, we have three good skippers, so we know what has to happen. Dan finished 5th in his first NAs as a skipper, so I know he's a hugely talented sailor. Tobi is the best starter in our fleet when she skippers, and she helps to keep us relaxed but focused with her wit, organization, and ability to read wind on the water. She's also a former triathlete and has a very competitive streak. I guess, at times, we all work hard not to be the biggest wimps on board. Having them on my boat is a privilege, I just want to be up to it.

Let's go back a couple of years and chat about the junior programs you've been involved with and the Lightning Junior NAs. Add your suggestions.

The best junior programs always had an exit strategy for the junior sailor to transition into the 'open' fleet. This requires people to extend invitations, take chances, and share their knowledge and time on the helm. I can't think of a better junior program than what Larry MacDonald and Jody Swanson/Starck are doing right now with kids. To come on to those boats as a junior just must rocket them down the learning curve at an incredible speed. I really respect Larry and Jody for their current approaches and generosity.

Take us through the first time you lead a NAs race, what was the feeling was?

Leading at the windward mark in an NAs is a truly heady feeling, but if you actually think about it in mid race you have already lost it. We try to remain focused, know the races ahead of us with the opportunities that we need to capitalize on and really only relax, reflect and analyze after that race is over.

The feeling of winning your first NAs race, this year?

It sounds like ego, but winning the first race in Sheboygan came more easily for us than race #5 (7th). Sometimes it is just like that. After the first day with a 1-1-2, it sunk in that we really had it dialed in. That made for one long, sleepless night.

What are your other hobbies and is it used to perform better while sailing?

I exercise, try to learn patience by having 2 high energy boys (10 and 7), and be the best parent of a child with special needs as I can be. I owe a ton of gratitude to Chris, my wife, for the way she has supported my time commitments for sailing. It is truly a humbling experience. I figure, after that, racing sailboats is pretty non-threatening.

You mentioned your son is now sailing, chat about how that feels and how this may help your families challenge?

For us, it is about bonding time and perspective on the rest of life. Sailing is both a metaphor for life and an escape from the realities of day-to-day life. That why I love it. If sailing can help my son see beauty, or have fun, or be healthier, AMEN!

Dumbest thing you ever saw while sailing?

I saw a guy finish an NAs qualifying race in the Blue flight and step to the leeward shrouds to relieve himself. His crew steered back onto the racecourse and hit one of the leaders in the green flight race. They were DSQed after the fact. That was dumb and crazy.

Strangest event you attended?

Strange events happen all the time in small lake sailing, so I am fairly immune, but one sticks out. To get to the '95 NAs, we had a one race districts that was shortened to a 2 leg drifter. We were lucky enough not to get the lead too soon and took the guy, that was strange.

Hardest loss to accept?

Some of my college sailing losses were tough to take because I lacked the maturity to put it in perspective. However, the one that hurt the worst was in Burlington in '01, when we had a 2 point lead going into the last day and finished 6th overall when the breeze came up out of my strike zone that year. That was one long 1,000-mile drive home.

Luckiest event you won?

Sheboygan NAs was my luckiest win. You have to have good luck to win the NAs, but as I said earlier: the harder I work, the luckier we are.

Best event, socially?

The Bluenose, every November in Nashville. I try never to miss one.

Best event racing in other boats, not Lightnings?

The 1998 470 Olympic Trials in Newport was the best two weeks of race management I think I'll ever see. We did not place well, but the racing was superb. In the Lightning Class, we have such a high standard and Class guidelines to ensure a good event the pattern is much tighter. The one that stands out is the Detroit NAs in '97 that Tom Vickers and his team ran, maybe that is because I was crewing and has more time to observe.

Regatta that you'd like to forget?

1976 Sheboygan NAs. The boat was destroyed in the first qualifier, I was 16 and in way over my head. 3 of us almost drown. It was VERY sobering.

Regatta I'll never forget?

The Sheboygan NAs 2005, baby!

We took your magic wand away, but if you could change anything on a Lightning, what would it be?

I have no magic wand, but if I did, I would use it to help the Class return to a growth mode in Europe and South America. It would benefit all of us. That would be my wish.

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Matt's VERY proud parents—Lal and Pat Burridge