

Joyce and Parker Hirtle

By Laurie Atwater

How many of us look at piles of photos and say, 'I should do something with those!' Maybe they are photos of a beloved hobby or family events and we think wistfully...*Someday, someday...*

That day came for Parker Hirtle last year. Hirtle and his wife Joyce were avid sailors for the better part of their 62 year marriage. "We quit sailing in 2003," he explains. "Joyce was having difficulty getting onto the boat from the dinghy and we decided it was time." In the ensuing years Joyce suffered from increased mobility issues and was finally diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease.

"For some reason I started reading our old log books last year," he explains. "Joyce had written a lot in the logbook. I tended to write navigational stuff, but she would write stories." He set out to chronicle their "sailing adventures" by combining all of the entries into one narrative. Then he added the pictures and before he knew it he had a book that he calls *Me and My Boats*.

The Hirtles many sailing photos have been organized on Parker's laptop computer which he has rigged up to connect wirelessly to his TV. I was treated to a slide show that shows the many great destinations that the couple enjoyed and the evolution from the very first "pocket" boat to their final boat Pearl III. Along the way there are pictures with Lexington neighbors, people they befriended through sailing and the occasional hospitable boater or interesting craft. The pictures tell a story of a happy family and a great hobby.

In 2009 Parker completed his project. On January 11 of 2010, Joyce passed away. His

book is dedicated to the memory of his beloved first mate.

"When I sat down to put it all the information together I decided to go all the way back to my childhood in Nova Scotia where I first fell in love with the water," Hirtle explains. "I was born on the bank of the LeHavre River which was a tidal river. My love of boats and boating was in my blood. Even after my family moved to Watertown Mass. When I was five, we always went down home for summer vacations. I spent a lot of time on the river in a rowboat, and swimming and fishing and building a raft—a lot of time on the water."

As a boy, he lived on King Street in Watertown which was a steep hill. At the top was Grandview Avenue which was level and also unpaved. "After a rainstorm, there were fantastic mud puddles," he says. It was a great place to sail the little pine boats that he and his brother would design and race in the huge puddles.

In High School he joined the Model Yacht Club and built a three foot sailboat. "We built these models and then raced them in the lagoon on the Charles River in Boston," he explains. "I won the trophy that year with my boat the *Falcon*."

In his Senior year he built a sailboat from plans in the *Mechanics Illustrated* magazine. It was an 11 foot sailboat that he built in the basement much to the dismay of his mother. He called it the *Moth*. "I even made the sails using my mother's treadle sewing machine," he relates with a chuckle.

His father had to cut through the floor joists to get the boat out of the basement! They brought *Moth* to a cove on the Charles River and took it for a sail. The *Moth* continued to be sailed for years by his brother's family on Lake

Cochituate.

Parker graduated from Watertown High School in June and by August he was in the army. "They snapped you up quick back then," he says with a smile. After the army there was college marriage and family and, according to Hirtle, "a long hiatus from sailing."

But the water was never far from his thoughts. It was 1964, Parker and his new wife Joyce were living in Lexington. They visited Nova Scotia for vacation. It was during one of these visits that Parker came across an article in *National Fisherman* called *Pocket Cruisers—A New Approach*. It opened his eyes.

"I thought you only sailed if you lived on the water," Parker says. "But pocket cruisers are designed

to be trailed behind a car or truck. It was an article by J.S. Slightholme and I thought 'gee, this is a great idea—the idea that you could trailer a sailboat and cruise in it sounded pretty good to me.'"

It may have been fate because about a week later Hirtle saw an ad for a boat called the *Alacrity* and they went up to Marblehead to take a look at it. "We sailed the boat and placed an order for a new boat and the trailer on the spot," he says "That was the beginning of our cruising."

Cruising on the ocean is different from day sailing. Cruising is just as much about the destination and the 'getting there' as it is about the sail. When you cruise you are covering a distance that requires living aboard ship for days or weeks at a time. "We sailed that boat for two years on weekends and stayed overnight on it." Though the *Alacrity* was small, the experience for the young newlyweds was both adventurous and relaxing. Being out on the open water, away from the cares of the world gave them a chance to settle into marriage and have some fun.

Then, they bought a "junk" lot on Baskin Road in Lexington and designed a house that would work on the steep incline. Money was tight so they sold the boat and since Parker was going to do all the finish work on their new home himself (he is an accomplished woodworker), they figured they wouldn't have weekends free for awhile.

So began another spell away from the call of the ocean, but not for long. By 1992 things had settled down a bit and "finances were better, so we bought a 22 footer—still trailable—and we started getting serious

about sailing." They allowed the boys to name it and it became *Snoopy*! They found *Snoopy* in the want ads in the *Boston Globe*.

*Snoopy* was a Catalina 22. "It had a swing keel and a center cockpit and an aft cabin with 2 berths," Hirtle says. Parker and Joyce enrolled in piloting courses with the Power Squadron in Boston. Eventually Parker completed all of the courses and earned what they call a "Full Certificate." He ended up serving a year as commander. Joyce took all of the courses right up through advanced piloting.

With *Snoopy* they began to explore the coast of Maine with their two boys. Looking for places to anchor while they explored along the shore and

ed conditions, course headings and anecdotes about what they saw or who they encountered along the way. She also documented the many delicious meals she cooked in their small cabin which as anyone who has ever attempted it—is no small challenge—and the pride they took in outfitting the boat so that it worked well for them. Parker made his own modifications to each of their sailboats.

And then there are the dinghies! The dinghies tell the story of an exacting engineer (Hirtle worked for BBN as an acoustical engineer) and a problem-solver who had his share of successes and failures in the dinghy department. Dinghies are important to sailors



Racing Pearl III off Block Island

scouted places to camp out which the boys loved. Along the way, they discovered a favorite spot to anchor and camp ashore—McGlathery Island which is one of the archipelago of islands between Deer Isle and Isle Au Haut. McGlathery is owned by a conservation group called The Friends of Nature. Again and again the photos return there through the years, providing a beautiful touchstone for the family on the Maine Coast.

Navigation was always tricky. "This was long before GPS," Hirtle says with a smile. "Our first two boats all we had was a chart, a compass and a lead line!" The challenge of sailing has always drawn Hirtle in. "It's a little battle each time you're out there," he says. "What is fun are the problems. With sailing there's a combination of freedom and challenge that I love," he says. Hirtle recalls two experiences very clearly—one episode of fog navigation off Jewel Island outside of Portland and another later in their boating life off the coast of Nova Scotia with "fair winds" and "following seas," the sophistication of autopilot and the blessing of each other's company. "We cruised along 70 miles and saw not one single boat," he recalls fondly. "Joyce really loved it! It was a beautiful day"

Joyce Hirtle was the archivist in the family. She maintained the journals that became the reference point for Parker's book. In her journal she record-

ed and are often a source of conversation and interest at the local dock. Hirtle actually rigged two of his dinghies for sailing and his son John enjoyed sailing *Nit 1*. *Nit 1* was the very first dinghy which Parker built and *Periwinkle*, the 4th dinghy they bought. Dinghy Number 5 was inflatable which proved to be a nuisance.

After *Snoopy* came the *Anemone*, a Midship 25. They hauled this boat behind their Delta 88. "The first thing I did was buy air shocks for the Olds," he laughs. They made their first trip in 1974 and followed that with many trips including a long Maine cruise in 1977.

After cruising the Maine coast for several years, they wanted to cruise all the way to Nova Scotia and thought that they needed a boat that would better accommodate the family for a long trip. They bought a Cape Dory 30—a ketch designed by the noted naval architect Carl Alberg. They named it *Pearl II* after the boat that the Hirtle ancestors sailed in from Germany to Nova Scotia in 1751—The Pearl. Their trailer days were over—Pearl II found a mooring in Marion harbor and the Hirtles called that harbor home for the rest of their sailing days. *Pearl II* served the family for about five years.

*Pearl III*, the Hirtles fifth and final boat was a Crealock 37—a double-headsail yawl. It was

roomy and handsomely appointed. *Pearl III* had a compass, a depth sounder, a knot-log, a wind meter, radar, GPS and a laptop computer! They had come a long way since *Snoopy*! Hirtle had spotted the Crealock in 1983 at the Annapolis boat show. It was a big decision, but Hirtle recalls discussing it with Joyce and after they reflected on the plight of their very good friends—one who died of breast cancer and her husband who had suffered a stroke—they decided to go for it thinking: 'Who knows how

much time we have left!'

They owned the *Pearl III* for twenty years. In 2003, they took their final cruise to Maine. They were now in their late seventies. They had been sailing together for almost forty years, but they decided it was time to come ashore for good.

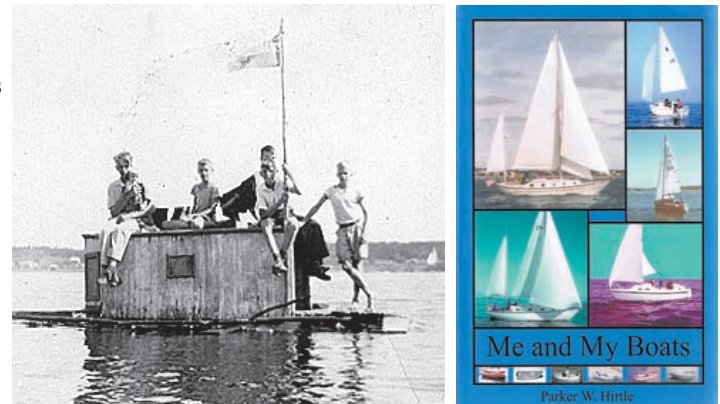
*Me and My Boats* faithfully recounts many of the details of the Hirtle's cruising over the years. From routes to great details like good restaurants, beautiful views and the techni-

cal aspects of sailing in Maine and Cape Cod, under many different weather conditions. But it is more than that. It is a chronicle of Parker Hirtle's love for boats, love of the water, love of adventure, love for New England and especially the coast of Maine, and most of all—love for his wife Joyce—his partner in all things.

To learn more about Parker's book, please visit: <http://www.books onboard.com/index.php?BODY=viewbook&BOOK=509803>

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Parkers first seagoing vessel—a raft on the LeHavre River in Nova Scotia. *Me and My Boats*, Parker Hirtle's account of he and his wife Joyce's sailing days is dedicated to her memory. The book is a great resource for anyone who likes to sail the Maine coast and loves the ins and outs of sailboats. Below an article in a magazine called *Pocket Cruisers*, *A New Approach*, got Parker and his wife off on their sailing adventures will "trailable" boats. The *Alacrity* was their first trailable sailboat. The family discovers *McGlathery Island* where they would return to for years. The *Snoopy* sets off with the family with Parker's hand made dinghy on top of the car roof! The *Anemone* behind the Delta 88. Parker rowing his dinghy.



The Pearl II was a real step up for the family.

Taking delivery of the Pearl III.