

'Voyaging with *Marionette*' - Our Book



Our book is about my 25 years with this 1960 Sparkman & Stephens design #1497 Dolphin 24, hull #12, named *Marionette*. She had been donated to the Connecticut River Museum in Essex, Connecticut, and had been out of the water for over 10 years. I found her under a torn blue tarp in the parking lot in back of the museum on a cold rainy day in December 1995. A friend, familiar with her design and history, assured me she was just waiting for me.

So, having retired early from the 'game,' I bought her for \$3,000 and looked forward to restoring this lovely but neglected boat for singlehanded daysailing, overnighing to places like Stonington, Fishers Island and Block Island, and occasional racing. I did not realize at the time that I had signed on for a long-term relationship with this very special 'lady' that would take me on

voyages not imagined. She had a fascinating history, loved compliments, loved racing, especially in light air, and loved taking me for rides, especially to Maine, where pretty boats have a special place.



We started our life together in a cleared-out field near my house, backed up to a tree with a blue tarp overhead while I scraped, sanded, painted, etc, etc, etc. After several months she said, "*Enough with this blue tarp stuff, I'd like a barn*". So, without any experience in this game I 'voyaged'. I bought a cadcam system and designed!!! a post and beam, peg construction barn. I sourced the wood from a local sawmill and a professional barn builder helped me put it together....



She liked it!!!!



Marionette's home port is Niantic Bay YC in Niantic, Connecticut where I have been a member for over 40 years. In early years we sailed and raced locally my kids

(Mike and Nicole, now fully grown), were lured back home to race on Dad's pretty boat - they were both All American sailors at Yale! and no handicap changes because they were on the boat!! We did well, especially racing out to and around Block Island.

Cruising single handed we gradually went further and further up the New England coast to Newport, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, until she had me sufficiently trained to take her to Maine.

In those days we had an inflatable dinghy which was stored in a quarter berth on long trips but was usually towed on shorter day trips. *Marionette* had received many nice 'pretty boat' compliments but I also heard had many side comments, especially up in Maine, about her dinghy like "Why can't you give her a proper dinghy????"

Another 'voyage'! I had equipped the barn's 2nd floor like a wood shop, and at *Marionette's* urging I attended the John Gardiner Boat building school at Mystic Seaport. *TEER* was built and *Marionette* liked her! So did the Mainers!! Have you figured out why her name is *TEER*?



Vertical pressure on 'TEER...



...and 'TEER complete

As the years went by I was drawn into the history of *Marionette's* design. She was designed and built in the late 1950s transition period from wood to fiberglass - she has

a foot in both periods having a solid fiberglass hull, otherwise all wood. I thought I'd join the Sparkman & Stephens Association and maybe learn something about her background. After all, the Dolphin 24 owes her genes to *Finisterre*!!



At Mystic

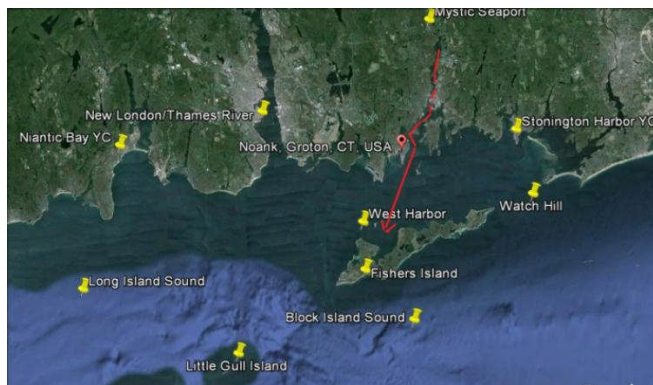
In 2004 we were invited to be a part of the Sparkman & Stephens 75th Anniversary celebrations at the New York Yacht Club in New York, and at Mystic Seaport.

This event was 4 days with the last two at Mystic Seaport. There were lots of interesting and rewarding happenings - A Mt Gay Rum hosted cocktail party was a great start, then the Concors d'Elegance, a contest (more like an arms race), for the Best Restored Boat - we lost to *Bolero*.....

Then, on our last day, we had a cruise down the river and across Fishers Island Sound to attend a luncheon for S&S 75th attendees. It was hosted by the International Yacht Restoration School in West Harbor. A rafted arc of classic taff railed motor yachts, free champagne, tables loaded with delicious food - the ticket to attend was to bring your favorite. *Marionette's* crew included the Secretary of the S&S Association in France, Hervé Elias (Je parle Français!) Four pictures - 4000 words.....



The Raft



The Mystic Seaport to West Harbour Chart



Herve Elias



The grazing table

I had met Olin Stephens and Bill Shaw, the S&S project Dolphin 24 designer, and one thing led to another. Someone had to do something to document and preserve the history of the Dolphin 24 so I decided to start up a website devoted to this class of sailboat - in 2007 Dolphin 24.org was born - **another voyage.**



Thousands of pictures - not here - still going at it, 235 Dolphin24s found of the 300 built



Marionette's racing has been especially rewarding

Marionette's racing has been especially rewarding. In 2017 I was 'dragged' to Lagos, Portugal to accept the Sparkman & Stephens award for the best performance by a S&S designed yacht in the prior year. It was given based on her racing in the Spring Off Soundings regatta for the best corrected time in the race around Block Island - 112 boats racing.

Marionette did hint that maybe we could go together but I chickened out. Receiving this award was really special. Did I mention that she's won it 3 times? I blame Patrick Matthieson for these voyages - he made a comment, published on the S&S website June 18, 2009 about *Marionette's* performance in 2008 when she finished 2nd to *Dorada!*



Camden Lights

While she likes Block Island, cruising and racing in Maine is special for *Marionette*. She's raced 4 times in the Camden Classic Cup with 2 wins in her class and a 2nd place finish.

We'll finish up with this photo below. *Marionette* really likes the pretty boat reputation that she has earned. Eggemoggin Reach is famous for attracting pretty boats, and world-famous photographers who take their pictures. Here's one by Benjamin Mendlowitz (The Wooden Boat Calendar). Her solid mahogany cabin and varnished woodwork fool a lot of people. Daughter Nicole and husband Bruce were escorting *Marionette* from Blue Hill, Maine to Bucks Harbor on the Reach, and Benjamin came out for a closer look. Our glass hull kept us out of the Calendar, but we bought the print!!



On Eggemoggin Reach

Photo: Benjamin Mendlowitz

Ron Breault

Marionette

Old Lyme, Connecticut, U.S.A.

Editor's Note

Ron's book, '*Voyaging with Marionette*' is beautifully illustrated with lots and lots of photographs. It has had several very complimentary magazine reviews - excerpts below from *Points East*, *Windcheck* and *Good Old Boat/Dogwatch* magazines, and another by a local online news service, *Lymeline*.

Windcheck Magazine, August 2020 - "*highly recommended...Although he did not realize at the time, Ron had signed on for a long-term love affair with a very special shoal draft 24-footer built during the boatbuilding industry's transition from wood to fiberglass construction.*"

Good Old Boat/Dogwatch - August 2020 - "*The sheer variety of clippings, photos, and anecdotes make the book fun to browse.... they have an endearing quality, each a proof of his everlasting devotion to Marionette*"

Points East Magazine, September 2020 - "*Voyaging with Marionette is a love letter to his Dolphin 24*".... In the book Breault reveals that, after retiring, he was casting about for something that would give his life meaning in the way his job previously had. His ownership of Marionette – and running a website dedicated to her class – seems to have been just the ticket

Lymeline - August 2020 - "Ron and Marionette's story illustrates superbly that famous conclusion drawn by 'Rat in Wind in the Willows': "Believe me, my young (and aged?) friend, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats." So ease your sheets, cruise downwind a bit, pop a brew or two and enjoy this love story".

The book is published by Whaler Books/MarinerMedia, 329 pages and is available online at <https://marinermedia.com/product/voyaging-with-marionette> and at a growing number of local bookstores.