



SANTA BARBARA

YACHT CLUB

Charles E. Watson, 1987

As we sat in the SBYC lounge recently, Charley and I remarked on the beautiful, sunny day and chatted about local landmarks, past and present. As a third generation Santa Barbaran, he and his family have seen many of each come and go. He remembers stories told to him by his paternal grandmother about watching the railroad being built so travelers could visit our fair city without having to brave the often-rough seas on their way to spending a glorious vacation at the Potter Hotel. Her husband, by the way, was a plastering contractor on the popular tourist destination.

Although he was always interested in the ocean, Charley was never much of a boater until well into adulthood. Nevertheless, he was often on or near the water. As a youngster, he and his brother would often grab their fishing rods and ride the bus, as their dad did not buy a car until Charley was about 10 years old, to Stearns Wharf to go fishing. He had an uncle who lived with Charley's family while attending UCSB on the Riviera. This uncle had a friend named Pier Gherini, whose family owned a ranch on the east end of Santa Cruz Island. During the summers, he worked for the Gherinis, driving their supply boat, Patco. He would take Charley to visit the boat when he had it moored in town.

He met his future wife, Joan, on a blind date set up by her sister. Their first date was at a drive-in theater in the back seat of a car. Excuse me? Oh, not to worry. They were chaperoned by Joan's sister who was in the front seat with the owner of the car – Charley's friend and her boyfriend.

The years passed and Charley served 3 years in the Marines, first as a machine gunner, and finishing up as a topographic surveyor. "I advanced all the way to corporal!" His professional was spent with Penfield and Smith Engineers and Surveyors. The second half of his 30 years with the company was as Chief Engineer and President.

Charley's 40th birthday provided an opportunity for the couple to travel with friends. It was their first two week long vacation together. They left the children behind (in responsible hands, of course) and headed to Tahiti. That vacation resulted in a love affair. Joan would forever after knowing that when Charley wasn't home, he would be with his mistresses, the first of which was named Amity. Yes, the boating bug bit Charley on that trip and when the couple returned to Santa Barbara, Charley announced, "I want to buy a boat!" With his Coronado 25, he took lessons, joined the Sailing Club and learned to race and cruise. So did Joan and their four children. With six people on a 25-foot boat, let us hope the boat's name was reflective of the feelings of the captain and crew! After enjoying Amity for 5 years, they upgraded to a Catalina 27 named Eclipse, and finally bought their current boat Pacifico, a Grand Banks 32. As Charley explained it, he and his family were "cruiser-racers". They had had fun racing but most of their cruising was under power. "It was time for something a little more comfortable. Plus, it made for bigger parties!" Any other reasons, Commodore? "I just loved all the mechanical systems." Okay, Charley, you lost me there.

Charley told me he joined SBYC for the racing opportunities, the camaraderie and to learn more about boating, but I had a suspicion there was more to his reasons. I plied him with one of Chef Russel's fried ravioli and learned the real reason: The Marinis had invited Charley and Joan to the annual Halloween party at the Club. Charley dressed as a sea captain, complete with a fake parrot on his shoulder and guano on his back. Then-

commodore Max Lynn, “thought the costume was so funny, he invited us to join the Club, saying, “You’d make a good member!” “The Club has since become central to the couple’s social life, full of “people with the same values and interests.”

Charley had served on the Board of Directors for several years when his friend, Fred Rice, asked him to be his rear commodore. “I was happy to serve,” he shared. Charley’s commodore year began with a challenge. The Club’s manager left within the first month of Charley taking office. But he had, “a really good Bridge - Stan Los and Dexter Goodell – and a really supportive Board of Directors.” They hired Rick LaPiana from Talk of the Town restaurant, a locally well-known, upscale restaurant at the time. “He got our galley scrubbed down and in good working order,” and it was in ship shape for Opening Day. Charley is grateful that Club members were always supportive and gracious about all the changes, which were difficult at times.

We discussed two memorable events from Charley’s commodore year. One took place during a cruise to Santa Cruz Island. Once each year, members were invited inland to the Stanton Ranch for a barbeque. As commodore, Charley and Joan, as well as Stan and Lennie Los, “were privileged to have dinner in Carey’s dining room while he told us about the ranch,” as accompanying members enjoyed the pool and grounds. Carey Stanton died shortly thereafter, “so I saw the end of a long-standing tradition” between Stanton Ranch and SBYC.

The other outstanding memory from his commodore year was when Dennis Connors won the America’s Cup back from Australia. “We were able to arrange to have the America’s Cup come to the Club for a visit. The Cup, along with its retired FBI agent custodian, brought it up on a private plane that belonged to one of our members.” The Bridge, along with several city and county dignitaries, went to the SB airport, picked them up in another member’s limousine, and came to a private reception at the Club. The USS Gary, a Guided Missile Frigate, came up from San Diego to serve as honor guard for the event. There was also a public reception at Fess Parker’s Red Lion Inn. When the Gary left, Charley and fellow member Ed Attlessey “rode to San Diego on the ship as guests of the captain. THAT was the big highlight of my year.”

The past 27 years of being closely involved with the Club and its members have given Charley camaraderie and a social life with nice people who have, “like values, like interests in yachting, with a sense of adventure, lots of great parties.” So, what can the rest of us do that would result in our own positive 27 year experience with SBYC? That’s easy, according to Charley. “Get involved in the Club. Volunteer to do and help with activities. Get to know your fellow members. Make lasting friendships. Enjoy the ambiance, camaraderie, your access to the Pacific Ocean. “But” he declared, “only do stuff you like to do.” There’s a lot to like at our Club. Not sure where to begin to get involved? Just ask Charley.