



SANTA BARBARA

YACHT CLUB

Staff Commodore Nelson G. “Cork” Otis, 1978

When I arrived at SBYC recently to interview my latest victim, er Staff Commodore, over lunch, I knew exactly where to find my friend Cork Otis. I strode directly to the center table in the lounge where he was busy solving the problems of the world with his fellow deipnosophists. Okay, so maybe they were really just commenting on the beautiful Santa Barbara weather we’ve been experiencing of late, but they did resemble philosophers discussing lofty issues.

Nelson G. Otis grew up in Bay Village, OH, a small community on the shores of Lake Erie. Several of his friends had boats and there were “boats all around,” so by the time he was a teenager, he too had acquired his first sailboat.

After attending Fenn College in Cleveland, he was hired as an engineer near his hometown by Acme News Pictures, a division of Scripps Howard Newspapers. After he married Sally in 1952, the company transferred him to a place called Santa Barbara. He wasn’t familiar with the town, but “when I heard there was water nearby, I said, ‘Let’s go.’”

Seven years later, he took a position with D&R, Ltd., a local aerospace company whose principals were mostly Yacht Club members. He became a co-owner during the mid-‘70s and the company was renamed Electro Kinetics Corp.

Cork was always interested in sailing, and within a year of moving to Santa Barbara, joined SBYC. Since he and Sally were both raised in small communities with lots of friends, “the Club was the ideal way to make new friends with a common interest.” Since taking up residence in California, he has owned or co-owned 5 boats. Three of those were sailboats here in Santa Barbara, named *Resurrection*, *Swish* and the oft-mentioned *Adios*, co-owned with Stan Darrow, Sr. They were used both to race and cruise our shores and nearby islands. The other two were small powerboats on Lake Arrowhead.

From the time he joined SBYC, Cork was an active member. He held director positions from 1959 through 1961, when he finished the unfilled term of another director. “I think I have held almost every position in the Club except Treasurer and Secretary.” He reminded me that prior to 1964, the Club was without paid staff. “Many of the members did jobs and chaired committees that are no longer ... required.” They did everything themselves. “For a number of years, I was Bar Chairman. I struck up a deal with a local liquor store to buy our liquor at a discount.” But prior to 1966, the Club did not have a liquor license and therefore could not charge for drinks. In lieu of payments, donations were placed in a bowl on which the words, “Let your conscience be your guide” were written.

Enjoying the Club as he did, Cork felt “honored to be asked” to go through the chairs. He felt the Club had given Sally and him “so much over the years, it was a pleasure to repay in some way.” Cork has several outstanding memories of his commodore year. The first SBYC history book, *Then and Now*, was published. “There were some elderly members who I wanted to get information from and who aren’t around anymore.” In the Foreword of the book, Cork expressed that it was not intended to be a complete history of the Club, and the hope was that a second edition “incorporating more stories and pictures” would be published at some point in the future. Thirty years later, that tenacious desire has come to fruition with the soon to be published coffee table-style history book, *The History of the Santa Barbara Yacht Club and the Development of the Waterfront*. Well done, Cork. Also, during his year at the helm, the Club galley was remodeled and the first walk-in

refrigerator was installed. Another noteworthy milestone was the negotiation of the Evergreen Lease, which allowed the Club to make long range capital improvements, and which remains in effect today.

Cork currently serves SBYC as Membership Chairman and in that role has the opportunity to talk to new members. One thing he tells them is that they'll find a lot of people like him who have been members for 30 or 40 years. "I tell them the Club is friendly, but get on a committee, sit at our round table. Introduce yourself and get involved. If you cruise, go on a cruise. You'll come back with 20 new friends." Party planning is also a great way to get involved.

As I asked this gentleman my final question, he chuckled. Where did the name "Cork" come from? Apparently, there was a comic book character named Corky that had a lock of red hair that stood straight up, just like he did at his birth. "A nurse stuck the name on me." And stuck it has!