

KOLLEGEWIDGWOK YACHT CLUB

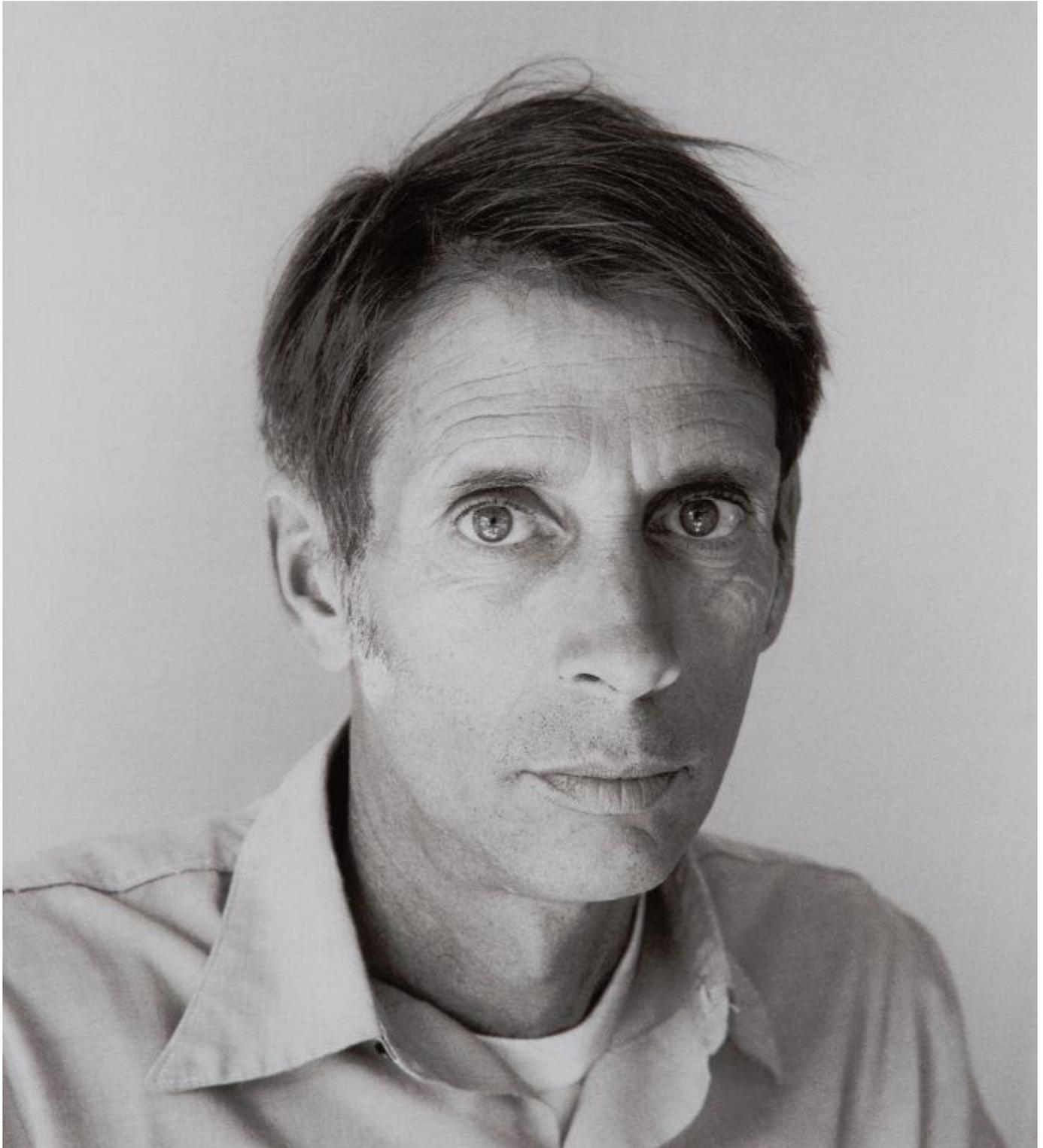


Blue Hill, Maine

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Berto Nevin died September 23, 2013. These memories are from his family and his many friends.



Photograph by Jeffery Beaton

Commodore Tom Richardson — Throughout his life Berto was an active and indispensable part of the Kollegewidwok Yacht Club. He was our Commodore, a sailing instructor, assistant manager, editor of *The Waterline*, a racer and a cruiser, member of the Race Committee, resident muse and institutional memory. His many sailing exploits qualified him for membership in the Cruising Club of America. He will be long remembered and dearly missed.

Jan Adams — The man had a quick mind and generous heart. He wrote the most graceful thank-you notes I have ever received. And he loved Jennifer so much.

Bitsy Becton — I have two special and long-standing memories of him. Two of his qualities that I admired most:

First - his extraordinary skill, fearlessness and creativity while managing to sail and even race an Atlantic by himself, how he and the boat became one. It was magical!

Second - A totally different side of him emerged when he stepped up to the infamous KYC upright piano. I would start laughing before he even touched the keys to play those exceptionally out of tune chords he could produce at will! He knew how to put humor in everything he played. We couldn't wait to hear what he would do next!

When Denny told me that Team Oracle had won the America's Cup, I could only visualize Berto hovering over the top of their mast going faster than imaginable in a sailboat! My theory is that his great sailing spirit lifted them to the final victory! And then he sailed off to that distant shore where the sailing never ends!

In my own heart I said goodbye after a brief encounter with him at the post office when we walked together to that iconic Karmann Ghia.

Henry Becton — While I always admired and respected Berto, my friendship with him, because of our age difference, came later in life. I count as one of the true pleasures of being commodore working with Berto on *The Waterline*. In his hands it has been a great unifying force of the KYC community. He was the perfect editor with the right combination of nautical knowledge, historical perspective, and playful tone of voice. He inspired me as a contributor and praised my writing as no one else did. I ended up doing more pieces for him than I ever imagined I would. I'll be forever grateful for his encouragement. I loved our e-mail exchanges and growing friendship.

On the water, I can't tell you the number of ways he's been a model for me of what one should be able to do, single-handed, in a sail boat. He set the standard. I have a vivid image of him sailing *Lucero* into the harbor against the tide, alone, with nothing but the spinnaker flying, and making his

mooring perfectly as he dropped the chute! In my head, he'll always be my seamanship coach. On our *Indigo* outing Jeanie and I noticed that he was still instinctively reaching to trim or handle a line properly when no one else was attending to it. What a sailor!

Jeffrey Becton — I am on a plane flying back from San Francisco where I have spent much of the week gazing out the window at his old stomping ground and marveling at how much he

has been in my thoughts (a view of the 34th America's Cup races notwithstanding). He was a friend whose presence in the world anchored a particular sense of belonging to and being part of a certain place and time – that is now beginning to pass. He will always be a part of me as he will of so many others for whom the name "Berto" reverberates on its own unique frequency and conjures up the handsome devil himself gliding by Sculpin Point in *Lucero* under spinnaker alone with the last of the afternoon breeze.



Louise Bourne — A few years ago I got to know Berto when Jennifer asked me to paint him. I went over to their house and set up on the patio while Berto read the paper. I learned that he was accommodating, and had a singular, quiet wit. Soon, I was chuckling and drawn into conversation. And much as he liked to read, he was restless and did not like to sit still. One of my lasting memories of Berto was seeing him at the boat landing in August. It was the end of the day with low golden light....He and Jen sat facing each other in folding chairs... knees almost touching while she painted him.

Alan Cameron — I used to run the London office of W.W. Norton and so I would meet Bert every six months or so at the sales conferences which we used to attend.

I was a relatively new boy in those days; I joined Norton in 1979 but Bert made me feel welcome. I was impressed by his voyage in *Curlew* from California to the East Coast and we talked a lot about sailing. My own dinghy in those days was miniscule!

But Bert was such fun and we used to get up to quite a few laughs, regularly going off for dinners or drinks in places which were not on the officially approved list of restaurants

or bars. But Bert was always on parade the next morning and I used to look forward greatly to his company. We held a conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1990 and Bert was in wonderful form on that occasion. He told me a great deal about his origins and his forbears on my side of the Atlantic, stories told with wit and humor.

Jennifer Cecil — My first memories of Berto date from his Judson School days in Arizona. Jane Nevin and I were classmates at Brownmore School nearby. As the decades passed, Berto's quiet manner, his inherent kindness and notable wit continued to enhance my life as our paths crossed in San Francisco, New York and Maine.

Ward Chamberlin — What a blithe spirit, giving more than he got in any gathering. I remember his sweetness of spirit and his generous nature. Anne (Chamberlin) would have had 15 stories, as she was so devoted to him.



Robin Clements — Berto was the walking definition of sui generis, with a range of talents – yes, more than sailing, though I've never known a better – and a pacific disposition that carried him through a truly blessed life, lighting the world as he went. After I got back from a week on *Curlew* with just the two of us – I caused the mainsail to tear pretty much in half through stupid helmsmanship, and B. had to drive to Moncton and spend a day to get it re-sewn – and he never blamed me, at least not out loud – Sam Taylor wisely said, “Ah, Berto. He wears well.” True, true, true. What a fine person he was, all his life.

Libbie Cluett — My first memory of Berto dates to when he was working at the Yacht Club. I was entranced by his dark eyes, huge grin, and humorous comments. Also his gagging around playing songs on the out-of-tune piano, deliberately changing keys, just as the listener caught on to the tune and began to hum it. This seemed to be done to

amuse, much in the style of Victor Borge, as if he weren't in control of his hands.

Later I became aware of his love of puns and palindromes,



his uncanny ability to mimic speech and phrases used by his friends, and his delight in reading literature. He could quote poetry. He could mimic the style of favorite authors. He could regale us with stories of his Army days. He was a raconteur par excellence.

Amazingly, he never forgot anything that happened when he was with his friends. He saved their letters, Christmas cards, remembered dates when important events took place. This kind of devotion further endeared him to them.

Best of all, he married the most loveable, loving woman, Jennifer Mitchell, who appreciated and cherished every aspect of his mind, humor, and personality, and they shared their love with all who knew them.

Mark Cluett — Berto loved to tell stories, especially about himself. Berto was a proud member of the Cruising Club of America (CCA) and always participated in some portions of their annual cruise if it was nearby in Maine.

One summer, the cocktail rendezvous of the Downeast Cruise was on North Haven at the home of Tom Watson. Since Berto had not been at any of the previous rendezvous he had to pick up his packet when he went ashore. The packet included a detailed itinerary as well as a placard that was to be worn around one's neck and included the name of the yacht and the skipper's name. Berto put the placard around his neck and started to mingle with the guests.

Almost immediately he noticed that when people approached him, they would look at his face, the placard and then his face again before wandering off. Berto sort of ignored this and didn't let it bother him.

It was only when he returned to *Curlew* and took off the placard that he noticed why he had received so many stares. The placard read:

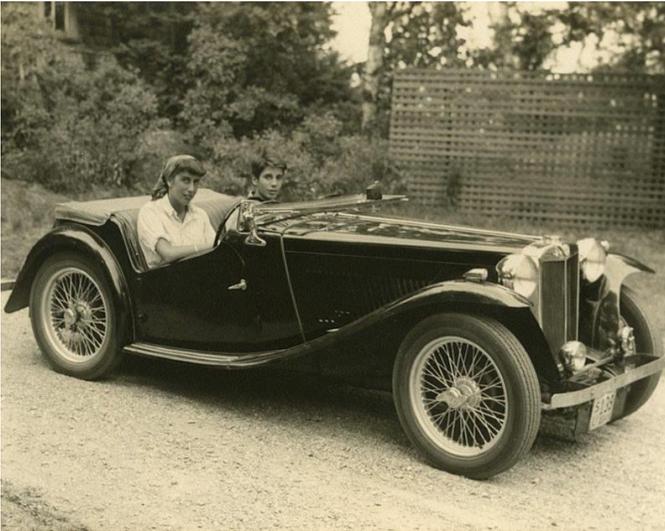
CURLEW—Ethel Nevin

For the last 20 years or so, I affectionately called our former commodore “Ethel”.

Kate Coit — Berto's Portrait. At the library art show a few years ago was a black and white photo portrait of Berto. The picture had been taken by Jeff Becton of Berto who appeared to be about 40. He was looking directly into the camera, young and soulful. He seemed to be ...listening?

Although he was known for witty word play Berto was a great listener. His conversation was lively yet he seemed to have a sort of calm, a reserve he showed while hearing out his companions. Seeing that portrait of his younger self impressed me with his essential composure that he still had at 80. I enjoyed his expressive silences when the turning wheels were almost audible. Berto had the unusual power of active listening, which made him gracious good company, and a little mysterious, too.

Patti Cruickshank-Schott — One of the great pleasures in being a companion for Berto's sister, Jane Guinness, was the interactions I had with Berto and his dear love, Jen. I loved Berto from the moment I met him... something about his



quiet demeanor combined with that irreverent twinkle in his eye... And his way with words... And his vast command of the English language... And he even wrote letters, real ones on paper... in the 21st century...

A favorite memory is of convincing Jane somehow (when she still lived in Maryland) that she'd talk with Berto on the phone... on his birthday... And I had to tell her he was in the hospital (according to Berto, "for no good reason"). Jane was all resistance and hesitation, but as soon as she heard Berto's voice, she just came to life... "I must come to you," she said. "where *are* you?" And they had a real conversation, interspersed with Jane playing the piano and me holding the phone so he could hear her...

Berto followed up in e-mails that Jane would carry around, reading them over and over. As would be expected, since they were from Berto, they were filled with humorous memories and songs he knew Jane would like...

"...and by the way, I just heard 'Lullaby of Birdland' on the radio. I still think it's one of the best jazz pieces ever written. Stay tuned.... Love, Berto"

We enjoyed reading E.B. White, *Jane and I*, and we came upon White's retelling of the stolen harpsichord story with Berto retrieving it in California. Jane was so delighted with this. When Berto heard about it, he wrote to Jane to thank her for "sending him back to E.B. White".

There is a saying, some believe from Marrakech, that "when a storyteller dies, a library burns." I had such a sinking feeling when I heard Berto had died... Almost all of Jane's memory has faded, and now Berto, who had one of the truest memories I've ever witnessed, was gone... He seemed to remember everything... to enjoy remembering and retelling every small detail of a story...

I hope, at least in some small part, our stories here can become part of that gift of remembering that Berto so generously gave to us.

Annie Curtis — Each time I saw Jen and Berto together it filled me with such love. Jen and Berto's devotion to each another was palpable. I always walked away, learning something new from his stories or considering his definitive take on whatever he shared.

Now each day I study his large chart on the wall of my studio. I see his nautical lines written in pencil, finding his route along this wild Baja coastline. He followed the whales and sailed right by where I look out every day. This is his gift I hold dear. He lived a full and fascinating life and Jen was his greatest treasure.

Dave Danielson — My family joined the KYC in the late nineteen fifties when I was ten or twelve years old. Berto worked at the club at this time, and when not working was a regular presence there. He was a good friend for fifty-five years.

I have many memories of Berto from all this time. Once, when I was working at the club during my school years, *Lucero*, Berto's Atlantic, dragged her mooring during a summer storm. Dick Gibson and I were able to save the boat before it went ashore on what is now Ken Fox's stone wharf. Berto watched the drama, while wringing his hands, from the yacht club deck. Afterward Berto kindly gave us both books on sail boat design and racing tactics. Another time we had to rush Berto to the hospital when his eye was injured by the errant end of a bungee cord used to furl *Lucero's* main sail. I remember a fun sail we had together with Tucker Cluett bringing *Lucero* from Benjamin River to Blue Hill. It was very foggy and we navigated with an antique box compass and a spare sail batten as a parallel rule. The can at Harri-man's point was a welcome sight!!

More recently during my present tenure as club manager I remember what fun it was running Down East Race Week on the KYC launch with Berto and Mark Cluett. Berto was often aboard KYC during the Atlantic series races. I prize the memories of conversations we had while the races were going on. Recently I had the opportunity to travel south on *Sirenuse* with Berto a couple of times. I would relieve Berto when the watch changed, and enjoyed the exchanges we had late at night on the boat's bridge.

Berto visited me at the KYC office late last summer. He was clearly not well, and I admired his determination. We talked, as usual, and he left with a few ideas for *The Waterline*.

Mark DeVoto — I first met Bert in the fall of 1964, in my first teaching job at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. He walked in my office door and handed me his business card. “Are you the grandson of ...?” I asked. He said he was, and asked me, “Are you the son of...?” knowing that I had had a famous father. We saw each other from time to time thereafter, on his regular traveler circuit, including at the University of New Hampshire where his cousin Tony Nevin was on the faculty. Bert came to dinner at my place at that time, in 1978 or 1979 as I remember. In 1978, too, the annual sales meetings for W.W. Norton were held at the Montauk Point Yacht Club on Long Island, and I came to those to talk about Walter Piston’s *Harmony*, fourth edition, which I edited and which had just been published. Bert was there, of course, and I met his colleagues and we all had a jolly clambake dinner, even though the yacht club was operating in receivership.

The last time we saw each other was in the early 1980s, after my girlfriend and I had bought a house in Eastport. Bert had just sailed into Eastport and called us up. He came to lunch, and we visited *Curlew*, which was small and neat and handsomely appointed. We lost touch after that and his associates at W.W. Norton, when I asked, didn’t know how to locate him, which I regretted. I wanted to exchange palindromes. He would have liked “Satan, oscillate my metallic sonatas,” especially coming from a musician.

Julia Blagden Emby — to Berto: That gleam in your eye and special smile let us know that you cared so much about those in the world around you.

Don Fusting — I first met Bert at the Norton sales conference in 1972, some months after I had joined the firm. It was impossible not to like him, to be amused by him, to be interested in what he had to say, to see how he extended the range of modesty. He had a wonderfully sharp tongue, tinged with humor. There was always that “I hope he knows I was kidding” in his expression. We travel a long road, and sadly, some never meet the likes of Ethelbert Nevin, I am among the lucky.

Rebecca Gordon — He was so funny and simply good. We should all be like that.

Chris and Sean Guinness — Favorite “bertoisms”....
“Prudence is the better part of valor.” Regarding ice cream: “you can’t go wrong with vanilla.” Our freezer will always be stocked with vanilla!

K Guinness — Having Berto as my uncle has been a source of great pride for me as long as I can remember. My mother’s beloved younger brother that I got to claim as my uncle. He ignited my passion for sailing at age eight when he took me on my very first Atlantic sail aboard *Lucero*. The breeze was up and the rail shot down and I was thrilled and hooked all at once. I was impressed at his ability to sail *Lucero* solo while flying a spinnaker in a fresh breeze and making it look easy. I admired all his sailing adventures, crossing the Atlantic, sailing solo from Long Island Sound to Blue Hill in *Lucero*, and in *Curlew*, from San Francisco through the Panama Canal and up to Blue Hill. I will always remember with great fondness our time spent on Airly Beacon’s porch engaged in easy conversation. His arrival was a high point in any day. Our porch will forever pine his absence. From there I can still see him sailing solo in *Lucero* on the far side of the Bay. He is moving well against the Long Island shore, standing tall in the stern, spinnaker up, shy smile beaming.



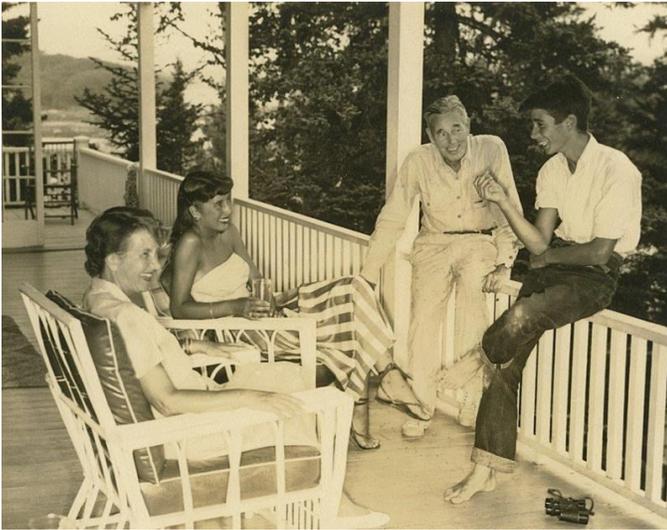
Photograph by Chris Guinness

Phyllis Hamabe — A summer Saturday in Blue Hill. Early 90’s, Francis and I at the Farmer’s Market, temporarily relocated to the Town Hall lawn. A great windmill of arms waving from outside Merrill and Hinckley to get our attention turned out to be our Tide Mill Island neighbor, bent on presenting to us an attractive young lady by the name of Jennifer.

Berto, a resident of San Francisco, had purchased a cottage from his aunt Doris and Jennifer, a family friend, would visit him there from New York.

We already knew that the air on “our island” was conducive to romance, and were not surprised to receive some months later a wedding announcement, the happy couple in Mexico.

Elizabeth Harries — I was almost exactly five years younger than Berto, so for many years he was one of those glamorous but impossibly older Blue Hill boys. Certainly the most interesting to me of a confusing bunch – there was even a rumor, confirmed by his later career, that he really liked books. His attachment to boats seemed different too: he liked



winning races, of course, but the boats themselves were important, their grace and lines as well as their speed.

A little later when we were both adults, we would occasionally share some desultory talk about books and writing. I wanted to learn more about what it was like to be a textbook salesman and was fascinated by what he told me; he was interested, I think, in what it was like to write academic stuff for publication. He claimed to like a little writing handbook I wrote for students at Smith, too, probably because it has a few moments of irreverence and unexpected examples.

I began to listen for Berto's quiet puns; renaming our downstairs bathroom with a faulty light "The Jeanne d'Arc"; talking about your spring garden fertilization project: "Call me Fishmeal." I loved his fascination with the Monarch butterflies Jen and Berto were raising together, and his story about the one that returned to their apartment on Bleecker Street to say goodbye.

He enjoyed having people come visit, even when he was beginning to be very tired. He was always reaching out, connecting, even at the end. And Jennifer made all this possible for him.

Roby Harrington — For many years Bert covered colleges in both the Bay Area and northern New England, a territory unlike any in the industry. That ended in 1979 (at least the New Hampshire part of the territory) and, as a recently hired 25-year-old, I followed in Berto's footsteps to campuses like Keene State and Plymouth State. That year, Norton was publishing the second edition of a truly ill-fated calculus text (why there was a second edition when almost no schools used the first is hard to fathom.) As a rookie traveler, and not having been told the book had done miserably in the first edition, I went from school to school growing increasingly anxious that

no one seemed interested in what I was saying about this math book.

Then I reached Keene State, and there in the bookstore was a stack of the first edition of the book. Excited at the prospect of both securing the business for the second edition and learning what was good about the book, I rushed straight to the math department. (Any other day my first stop would have been the English or Music departments.) There I meet the chairman of the math department and I ask him why they adopted the book and how had it been working. He said, "the main reason we adopted the book was your predecessor came into my office and said 'Ethelbert Nevin's the name, books are my game'" and then flashed a sly smile. He seemed to know almost nothing about the book, but we found him so curious that we looked through the book and decided to give it a try. We will not use the book again."

Bert's collection of moth-eaten, elbow worn-sweaters was a source of amusement at many a sales conference. And I remember one conference where Bert showed up with a particularly tattered sweater. Hank Smith, the national sales manager, was so moved by the dilapidated state of his friend's wardrobe that on bonus night he announced that he was starting the "Buy Bert a Sweater" fund and asked that we each contribute a small portion of our bonus checks to the fund. I can still remember the twinkle of Berto's smile as he examined his sweater after Hank's comments and then gave a slight nod as if to say "perhaps this sweater has seen better days." I remember thinking that he had nonetheless deemed the sweater worthy of packing and bringing to the conference. No one ever accused Bert of being a slave to fashion.



Shelley and Rob Jackson — There were so many versions of Berto in the thirty years we were lucky enough to know him. There was Berto the sailor, Berto the adventurer, Berto the writer, Berto the reader, Berto the punster, Berto-whom-you-hoped-you'd-be-seated-by-at-an-August-dinner-party, Berto the faithful friend who had the gift of making you feel like what you had to say really was of interest. Berto's best version, his best self, was undeniably Berto the husband. If Jen was in the room, his gaze went in one direction, and that gentle Berto smile never left his face. That's the Berto we'll remember most.

Joe Janson — Berto and Hank; the New Hampshire fall college meeting Once upon a time and en route to a Norton meeting in rural New Hampshire, Berto and Hank converged on our home in Stratham. On our return from the meeting they were invited to overnight together downstairs in our big double bed. At breakfast the next morning Hank admonished Berto for forgetting his “good morning” kiss. This really broke up Joyce who has never gotten over it.

Kathie Keane — When I first came to Blue Hill in the early 70’s, Berto’s name I knew, long before I met him. In the Becton household racing was taken very seriously and Berto Nevin was the man to beat! I had an image of a large, mean, strong, very difficult man before I met him at some KYC affair. This dark, lean, reserved, gentle man could not be the same one that they spoke of at the dinner table. Could it?

Each family member had their own story of Berto. He won by three boat lengths – he sailed with a short crew, he sailed solo! This was almost Greek to me but by and by I had the same awe of his ability to handle sailboats. He was a champ and so gentle and a quick wit too.

Donald S. Lamm — I had more flashbacks about that wonderfully quirky man whose spoken words seemed to come from an immense reservoir of wit and charm.

It was my good fortune to be the first Nortonian to interview Bert Nevin, who took an elevator two flights up from American Book Company at 55 Fifth Avenue to our offices on the fifth floor. Why that trip? No doubt he told Jennifer more than once that his decision to leave American Book was driven by the recalcitrant attitude of his boss there, a Dr. (sic) Rundle, to compensate him for the time he spent recuperating from a procedure that left him with considerably less than an entire stomach. (Obviously so lean a man had not submitted to an operation to lose excess weight.) The wry humor that sparkled in those bright eyes won us over at once and soon he was launched on a career that made indelible friendships for him and Norton as well.

I could go on for several pages about the Nevinesque moments at the firm. But I will limit myself in this note to one: When he approached me about taking time off to embark on that sailing adventure down to the Panama Canal, I laid down one condition: That he would have to give up his Northern California territory and go to the end of the line if and when he returned to duty. He did not hesitate to accept that requirement. But he was sorely missed by his contacts out there, several of whom insisted that Norton was not the same place without Berto. They were right. And when he came to the office after his epic voyage, deeply tanned and with his battered khakis cinched by a rope around a wasp waist, all of us were delighted with his determination to resume his career even though it meant traveling in the icebox states of the upper Midwest.

Bert was far from a standard issue college sales representative. His low-key approach won him many loyal friends in academia, as I observed first hand. No doubt, he was a great man on a sailing craft. On the ski slopes, though, he was

something of a menace mainly to himself. (I spent a day with him at Squaw Valley and had to recommend that he take lessons or we would have to cancel his medical policy.)

Legends have grown up about Bert – and most of them true. Above all, I shall remember the day he came to me to



introduce me to the woman who rescued him from bachelorhood. Perhaps that marriage eventually led to an earlier retirement than necessary from Norton. If so, it was an indisputably better deal.

Kathy Long — Once again I am shedding tears for a sailor who’s gone. Tom thought the world of Berto, and I feel privileged to have been on the outskirts of the circle.

Alida Lovell — Berto seems to have always been there in our summer lives; I first realized this when I was 10, he was 13. Berto was Blue Hill's special character even then. It is as an awareness that came to me in my later years; that after being Berto's crew for almost 10 years, first in J boats then in Atlantics, he was a casual racer but overall the best *seaman* I have ever known or anyone has known. Low key, extremely droll, with a delightful sense of the ridiculous, Berto was a fun companion while handling the spinnaker and I on the helm – that is, if the seas were calm and we weren't too busy. Until Jen came in to his life, sartorial in his dressing he was not. In the old days he would pull his clothes out of whatever duffle bag he had brought home from school or college; somehow he would manage to look presentable.

Everyone in Blue Hill knew Berto and considered him his or her friend. He was valiant to the end and a good, good friend always. I shall miss him.

Jim Mairs — I am honored to be asked - I liked Bert enormously. Sometime in the mid-sixties when we were both college travelers for Norton, Bert and I were assigned to room together at the annual sales conference, held at the Wake Robin Inn somewhere in Connecticut. We met in the lobby

and were given the key to our room to which we proceeded. Bert was in front of me with the key and I had the bags. Upon opening the door there was a mighty scream followed by a naked young man leaping up from on top of his equally naked bedmate, and rushing to push Bert out of the room. Bert was moved backward by the closing door and I fell over our bags. Bert, with usual understatement, said "I think someone's in our room." or words to that effect. He looked stunned.

It turns out the honeymooning couple had asked for, and been granted an extension of their reservation but the Wake Robin failed to write it in the book. Bert and I got another room and hoped we would not see the happy couple during our stay.

W. Drake McFeely — It was a pleasure to have known him throughout my career. A few snapshots. The first is of a guy whose Brooks Brothers button-down shirts tended to have tiny pinholes in them. Bert enjoyed smoking pipes back when I first met him. Driving and smoking a pipe don't mix, so sometimes a burning ash would wind up on the front of his shirt. Of course, for a practically minded fellow like Bert a tiny burn hole was no reason to throw out a perfectly good shirt, so off to the laundry it went.

Bert also amassed probably the largest collection of parking tickets on his company cars of anyone in Norton history. I think he even got the boot at some campus with an extra aggressive police science department but certainly his car was well-known to campus cops throughout his territory.

These little anecdotes spring immediately to mind but what lingers is the wry smile captured beautifully in the photo accompanying his splendid obit and the stories of his whose direction only Bert knew for sure – usually they led to a pun, of course. Bert was a special guy, warm and engaging and as loyal as you could ask for. I enjoyed his company immensely and never more than the day in Blue Hill ten years or so ago when he generously took my father and me for a sail on that beautiful boat of his. The wind wasn't so great and we had plenty of time to talk, and talk we did!

I can't help but mention, as I think back, how much I have always admired Bert's decision to take that year off and sail his boat from San Francisco to Blue Hill. It was one of those life-changing undertakings that more of us ought to have the guts to do. And then, speaking of life-changing, he met Jennifer and I know, I have never seen him happier. I am grateful to have known Bert.

Diana Mitchell — Sweet Bertie of the rumpled khakis. Lover of Jennifer. Word player extraordinaire. Thank you and farewell.

Ellinor Mitchell — We came in second that Saturday, nothing to boast of in a class of five boats, but okay considering it was our first time in an Atlantic, ten feet longer than the boats we'd been used to the previous summer, Blue Hill Bay Juniors.

A coil of rope whistled over our transom. "We're towing

Berto home," said Jane, owner and skipper.

"Who's that?"

"My other brother. He's twelve."

I didn't know what she had for family; it wasn't cool to ask those questions, which mother thought peculiar, but it was a long time since she'd been almost sixteen. Crossing the harbor we had a nice following breeze, so I set the spinnaker again, more for practice than for need. I looked back a couple of times to check on our tow; Berto hunched over the tiller of his Brutal Beast, dark hair brushing across his grey eyes, steering deftly to slice the waves of our wake with his bow, expression as grim as a sniper's.

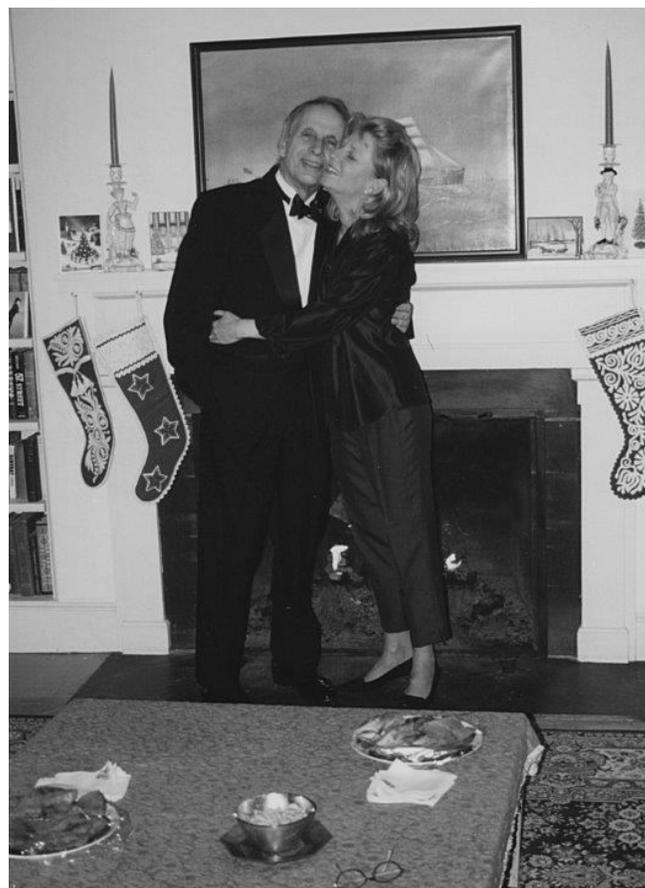
The wind died as we approached the cove where Jane's family moored their boats, and I was taking down the spinnaker when Jane hissed, "Look!" Gliding towards his mooring, in one smooth move Berto brought the boom amidships, let down the mainsail and hauled his mooring buoy aboard just as his boat's forward motion stopped.

"Nice work!" his sister called.

"Fourth try lucky, huh?" he replied, shrugging off praise.

Years later when our families were sprinkled from coast to coast a rumor circulated that my eldest daughter, through a mysterious magnetism interrupted by near-misses, was seeing Berto. She traveled for work and frequently passed through San Francisco where one of my brothers lived. As did Berto. And she visited Maine and would go to Blue Hill where her grandmother lived. As did Berto in the summer, in a house formerly owned by his aunt.

Jane's kid brother grew up to sail rings around most of us



who graduated from Blue Hill Bay. He sailed an Atlantic from Darien, Connecticut, to Maine single-handed, dodging rocks hurled at him by boys on a bridge across the Cape Cod Canal. And he sailed 7,000 miles from San Francisco to Blue Hill via the Panama Canal, on a voyage that included what Berto called some “unbearably interesting moments,” like passing through 45-knot winds in the Gulf of Tehuantepec off the coast of Mexico. Characteristically, Berto joked about these winds, calling them “Tehuantepeckers,” not dwelling on their danger.

It was his style to play down nerve-shattering episodes at sea and not parade his skill in dealing with them. It was a style which formed part of his attraction for my eldest daughter, and turned The Kid into a happily married man and delightful son-in-law.

Jennifer Mitchell-Nevin — I fell in love with Berto over the telephone. I looked forward to his calls and to that deep mellifluous voice describe what his day had been like, flogging text books at the various schools. He would describe in hilarious detail his conversations with professors and Norton colleagues imitating their accents and chuckling at a pun he had just unleashed. Every conversation took an unexpected turn; he could talk about anything, and I was interested.

I would call him when he was out so that I could listen to his phone message:

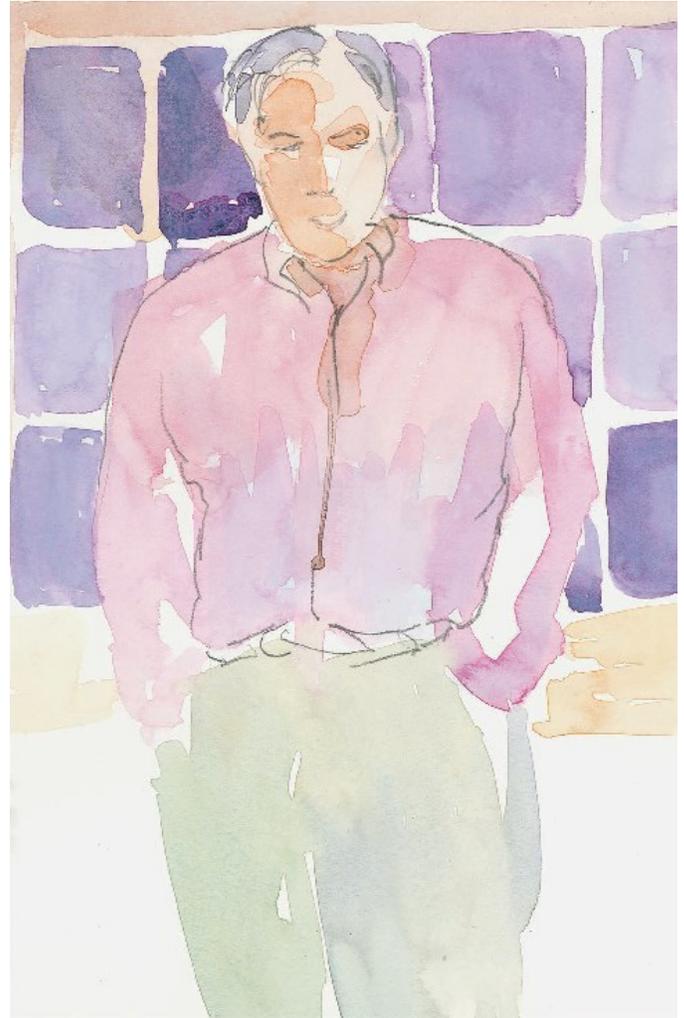
*This may be some news, I'm off on a cruise
Somewhere between here and Cape Sable,
But, if you remember
To leave your name and phone number,
I'll get back to you as soon as I'm able.*

In the evenings after dinner, by the fire, he would read poems aloud by Edward Arlington Robinson, which made me purr. Or he would read passages from a book that touched him – a particular one was from the *Team of Rivals* by Doris Kearns Goodwin about a meeting between Tolstoy and the Caucasus chief of the Circassians, who wanted to know every detail about Lincoln.

Driving between Maine and New York he loved to listen to his favorite classical music by Benjamin Britton, Eric Satie or musicals “New Faces of ‘52.” If I began nodding off he would say “but I am bursting with talk...” and talk we did... We kept travel logs in the car and I would write down his puns – we would laugh about the words we thought were clever.

During our train rides to Florida, as the setting sun came through our compartment window, he would pour a Maker’s Mark and I would paint his elegant, aquiline face. He was beautiful at every angle.

Watching Berto sail *Curlaw* down the East River was magical. He had proposed a few weeks before, and wanted to get the boat to Florida for our honeymoon. He called me at work on the radio. I rushed over to the 72nd street pier and saw him gracefully maneuver the boat, circling it around several times. He bowed, doffed his hat, and blew me a kiss. I watched as he continued south to Atlantic City for the night,



thinking how lucky I was that I was going to marry him.

Berto taught me many things, among which was how to read the water. He never yelled and he was wonderful company – that, combined with the smell of salt air and Berto, is why I was so smitten.

Robert Mitchell — Orders from on high had been issued: Berto was to acquire a suitable jacket for his niece’s upcoming graduation from Bard. He rang me: “Need to look splendid; your sister insists.” And like a shot, off we went from West End due East ‘til the reefs of Tanger (shopping outlet) presented themselves. As the distance had been traveled in less than the prescribed legal time, Berto kept referring to the “unbearable excitement” of the transit.... Several drivers, mistaking the jubilant driving for something menacing responded by shaking their fists; one even gave us the finger to which Berto remarked “Time wounds all heels”....

At the local Faconable outlet, we tried several jackets. His first choice was a dark blue, but when he noticed the sporty pinstriped two-button job, his eyes lit up. He tried it on, and all the while salesperson Madeline (in Berto-speak an FKO) oohed and aahed over how happy it made him look. He stood still while I took a phone-shot and sent it to upper management for approval. Once received, his decision to buy was

immediate, though not without an uttered thought: "This is probably the last jacket I'll buy"...On to the ATM machine. Where most people have a four digit code, Berto's PIN was "Filthy Lucre"...Made getting cash less immediate, smart man....

On the return we stopped at a hot-dog coach and each had a pair of Sabrett's laced with mustard and a red onion sauce. Berto felt that eating them was one of the more underrated road-side pleasures...The trip back at a civilized pace had the bonhomie of a task well done and a shared enjoyment. I miss his curiosity, his utter lack of critical voice, and his clever verbal jests that would leave many of us quietly chortling hours later.

Crocker Nevin (the younger) — You know, it's interesting. I've been making more puns lately than I usually do, maybe his influence. Among them...I'm working on a pornographic film about lumberjacks, and I'm calling it "Pulp Friction." Also, after trying for the better part of an evening, to see the Northern Lights, and failing, I referred to them as the "Aurora Bore-my-ass-off".

It was in the mid '70's, a series race. Paul and I were his only crew, and it was blowing harder during that race than any other race I've ever been in. Berto let out the traveler on



the main and tightened the sheet, basically leaving the boom almost on the leeward rail, to allow the wind to bounce off the sail a little and not just push us over. During the course of the race, there were times when the traveler would move so violently that metal shavings would fly up and gather on the deck. I was pretty nervous, even though Berto and Paul seemed to think it was all a lot of fun. Maybe I figured I'd get caught in the wrong place and get knocked over board or something. At one point, while sailing downwind, Berto pointed off the stern and said, "See that? That's a quarter-wake. It means we're going faster than hull speed and the boat is being lifted out of the water and our wake is being created not by the stern but by the quarter-stern, farther up the hull." I'd never heard of that term, or seen it in person, but I'll always remember what it looked like. And, needless to say, we won the race....

Elizabeth Nevin — I must say, Berto has brought out the poetry in everyone.

Paul Nevin — Everything connected to boats and the sea reminds me of Berto and what he taught me about the world – lovely lessons and lovely memories.

I took that lovely blue gray herringbone jacket that was Berto's. The sleeves are a bit short, which I will have fixed, and I love the idea of having something of his draped over my shoulders.



Philip Price, Jr. — Fog. That encompassing, dense moisture that blankets all in its path. And is all too familiar along Maine's coast during July and August.

My wife Sarah and I sat waiting anxiously in our house at the south end of Matinicus Island, wondering how the skipper of the 35-foot wooden sloop would fare sailing through thick fog from Blue Hill Bay to Matinicus, a distance of about 40 miles. At the end of the long journey Berto Nevin would have to find the mouth of the harbor, maneuver around the lobster fleet, and avoid the massive rock in the center of the harbor that is barely under water at high tide in order to find just the right place to drop anchor on the rocky bottom. Then he would have to row his dinghy ashore and use the only pay telephone on the island to call us. The call came! In a few minutes we met Berto with our truck and drove home for dinner and lively conversation about his trip, about which we were in awe.

This venture by Berto should not have been surprising, given that he had sailed from San Francisco Bay to Blue Hill Bay by way of the Panama Canal just a few years earlier. Needless to say, everyone who knew him admired his superb sailing skills.

There is so much to recall of Berto's accomplishments – loyalty, concern for others, gentlemanly qualities, and love of life, a man I had the privilege to know and be friends with ever since we were second formers at St. Paul's School 67 years ago. It is only right to recount two of Berto's sailing achievements for this publication, but with one important addition.

When I asked Berto soon after he and Jennifer Mitchell were married whether he would enjoy long summer days with her on the water, he replied, “No, Phil, I had to make a choice, the best one in my life, between sailing and being married to Jennifer. Since I could not afford both, I readily chose to be married to Jennifer.” Berto certainly got it right, as he always did during his full, active and happy 80 years of life. I miss him now and always shall, as will all who knew him.

MeMe Riordan — My memories of Bert are of the ultimate professional rep from W.W. Norton & Co. No one was like Bert! And when he arrived on campus and came into the English Department wing at City College of San Francisco, he brought not only news of books and other publishing items that broadened our awareness of what was going on around the rest of the country, but also the great pleasure of good conversation and ideas about whatever was especially interesting to him at the time. He always knew of the most interesting piece of fiction or non-fiction that would fit a particular student profile and, of course, lighted up as he recommended *The Perfect Storm*. All of us on the faculty were delighted to have his visits and were not pleased when he was given another assignment.

His broad perspective and sense of humor, his love of subtlety, detail, and experience, his curiosity and creativity, and the sheer energy of his interest in life were always so engaging: You easily can imagine the hilarity he provoked upon telling of how he searched for and hired the crew that was to have sailed with him around the world! Or his rather droll telling of why he decided to end the expedition.

One afternoon, hardly had he left my office to go down the corridor to visit Burt Miller before an old eucalyptus tree came crashing through the wall of windows facing the chair in which he had been sitting. Burt and Bert ran back to view the devastation, as I climbed out over the tree. “Well, *that* should shake your New England soul,” Burt said to Bert. Even that quip didn't erase Bert's realization of how miraculous his escape had been: Bert just pulled his hand through his already awry hair and turned away.

Bert was so bright! He could be devastatingly funny; he was alert to nuance; he was interested in people. He was kind and thoughtful. Whenever he wrote or we talked on the phone from Blue Hill, he asked to be remembered to a friend or former colleague he knew in San Francisco, even after years of being away. But the lingering memories of Bert for me have to do with his pride of lineage and the resonance of his glorious voice. My mother had sung Ethelbert Nevin songs to my brother and me all our childhood lives. And when a real live Ethelbert Nevin appeared in my office one day and eventually I asked the “are you?” question, and Bert answered “the II”, a connection was immediately established! And the voice, the chortle, the guffaw, the lingering laugh, the richness of his speech at the center of his very wonderful self.

What a loss if we'd never have known him!



Michael Schafer — There are several attributes that I remember most about Berto. He possessed a wonderfully inquisitive mind and an open, accepting personality.

He was humble, engaging and gentle in his demeanor. However, my most cherished memories would have to be his twinkly eyes and smile after he dropped a witty pun into the middle of the conversation at hand. You couldn't help but laugh with him. We will all miss that.

Margot Semler — When Ralph died, many kind, thoughtful letters arrived, but none as caring or as beautifully written as Berto's. Obviously, my gratitude and admiration have stayed with me, as has my delight in his all-too-rare presence in my life for over five decades.

Mary Semler — I met him first when he was ten years old, brown as a berry, with huge eyes, on the Falls Bridge. He looked like an Italian waif and when he said he lived in the villa on the hill it seemed just right. It was my first encounter with a Nevin.

Howard Sims — A man of rare vintage and infinite jest.

Hank Smith — When I joined W.W. Norton and Co. Inc in the summer of 1965 Bert had been there for two or three years. I met him at my first college department sales conference that took place in and around Scarsdale, New York. We all had large geographic territories and the newest kid on the block, me, had one from North Dakota to Louisiana. Bert's sales territory was no walk in the park either! San Francisco north to Oregon, Washington, Brit-

ish Columbia, Calgary; and occasionally he went to Hawaii and Alaska as well! We worked our territories from September into June and had the summer to recuperate. Bert's recuperation was sailing.

Among his many talents was mimicry. In later years, when I was a manager, he would get a salesman's voice down perfectly and put that voice on my answering machine saying outrageous things, such as his company car was floating down the street due to spring flooding in some town I had never heard of. I would call whoever owned the voice he used, only to be told there was no problem. When women started taking Norton traveling positions he could mimic their voices as well. He was an equal opportunity mimic.

And then there were the PUNS! Bert was a clever wordsmith with a great command of the English language. I sailed with him on his beloved boat, *Curlew*, for seven days and when we docked and headed for a California mathematics meeting, I was talking in puns and I couldn't stop. He made me laugh as few others have. His effect on others was the same. If Bert was tired of sitting through a dull meeting, he would get the attention of a red-faced Boston Irishman who sold books with us and make faces at him until he laughed so loud and long that the speaker would break off the meeting.

Bert was never happier than when he retired and married Jen. No one deserved this happiness more. He was a true friend, a wonderful companion, and being with him never included a down side. He is missed.

David Taylor — Some know this story, but some may not. Years ago, when Ethelbert was setting out in the world, he got a job with the American Book Company. Understandably nervous on his first day, he approached the first customer on his route and announced in that voice we can all hear, "Hello, I'm Ethelbook Nevin of the American Bert Company." I don't know if he made the sale.

I met Berto and *Curlew* in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, on the Bay of Fundy, home of the legendary tides, to help him sail back to Blue Hill. We left the next morning on the ebb and sailed out on a light breeze under power through the Letete Passage between the mainland and Macs Island. At least that was the plan. As we approached the southern end of the Passage, that brutal tide began to set us hard towards a large rock on the lee shore. If we rounded it, we would be safe in open water. If we didn't... At that point, Berto said,

"Here, you take the tiller. I'm going up on the bow." And he did. Even with the engine we were being set down hard, and I did not know what the hell to do except at the last moment swing the bow down and the stern up, and we slipped by, not by skill, but by luck. Berto came back to the cockpit, and I asked him why the hell I was on the tiller at that time, and he said, "Because I found it unbearably interesting, and it made me nervous." The he went below and took a nap.

In the early Sixties Berto bought an Atlantic somewhere down on Long Island Sound, and being Berto, he

single-handed it down east to Blue Hill. That summer and the summers after, he often sailed it alone on the bay. The prevailing winds then were mostly from the southwest, which brought him downwind into the harbor, and the picture I have indelibly in my mind is of Berto sailing the Atlantic home with only the spinnaker flying. At exactly the right moment, he would

douse it, and the boat would slip along towards the mooring, and Berto would wander up the cockpit, lean casually over the side, pick up the mooring line, wander back in the cockpit as the boat slipped forward, and drop it on the stern cleat. Elegance and mastery.

Michael Taylor — Back in the 1970s, when Berto was living in San Francisco, he called me up one day and said let's go sailing (not an unusual call from Berto.) I was living about a block away from Berto's apartment. Between us was a big, turreted house owned by director Francis Ford Coppola. Berto liked to call it "Coppola's cupolas."

It was a really hot day and we headed out on *Curlew* without any particular destination, but we had sandwiches and, we thought, plenty of cold drinks. "Where'd you put the iced tea?" I asked Berto. "I thought you were bringing it," he said. Oh well. No problem. By now, we were somewhere out past Angel Island, heading vaguely toward the East Bay.

"Hey, Berto, we have anything to drink?"

"Wait a minute," Berto said. "I think I have a gallon of water here some place." Berto rummaged around in *Curlew* and found a plastic jug filled with water. Warm water, it turned out. We tried it, and it was hot and tasted awful. So Berto rummaged around some more and found, in a cooler section of *Curlew*, a fifth of Jack Daniel's. The idea was that the cool whiskey would mitigate the problem of the hot water



and we'd be better off for it. We found some paper cups, poured some whiskey into the water and, Voila!, it damn sure tasted better. So we sipped on that one and then poured another.

There wasn't much wind out there, so it was not the kind of "unbearably interesting" sail, as Berto would put it, that you frequently get on San Francisco Bay, with its 25-knot winds. *Curlew* lolled along, barely moving in just a wisp of a breeze, the mainsail slack, the boom lazily drifting from port to starboard and back again.

"Hey, Berto, any more of that stuff left in there?"

"Sure, have some more."

By about 5 p.m., I think we were under the San Rafael-Richmond Bridge and it was about then that Berto looked at me and said, "so where the hell are we?" and I looked around and said, "beats me."

I also looked at the fifth of Jack Daniel's and it seemed to have about one inch left in it. Hmmm. Hmmm, indeed.

Getting a 35-foot sloop back to Sausalito in this condition was, well, unbearably interesting. We finally did nose the bow into the slip, with the sun going down over the Golden Gate Bridge.

The next time we went out on *Curlew*, we brought the iced tea. And ice. The Jack Daniel's stayed on shore.

Stormi Wentworth — I only knew Berto for a short time, but he made me feel like I'd known him all my life. It was an honor to have known him. He was such a kind, soft-spoken, wonderful gentleman.

I was fortunate to be at his 80th birthday party. I'd like to think my gift was his favorite (or at least he made me feel that way). It was a simple reading light he put around his neck. I saw him wearing it often when Jane and I would visit.

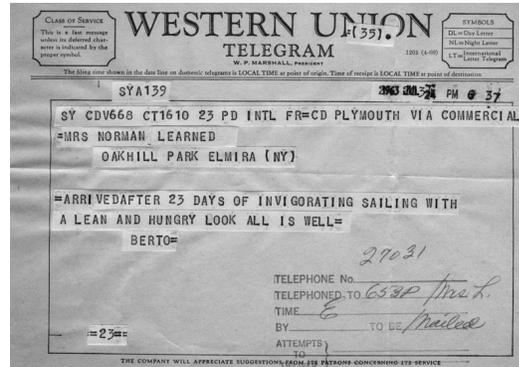
He was a strong man and fought a tough battle with cancer. He did not want to let his bride down. He pushed through his pain and would do anything for the love of his life.

Thank you, Berto, for letting me be part of your life. You are deeply loved and missed.



Jennifer Whiting — I've been thinking about Berto and his hilarious stories, particularly about transatlantic sails and people wanting to jump overboard because they couldn't stand each other — and also his stories about the Army — which made me wonder how we ever won any wars. That was a great obit — it was just such a glamorous life in such an unusual way.

Tappy Wilder — Once upon a time in the Magical World of Berto, I bought his first Karmann Ghia. The purchase came with a condition: I could only take possession if I delivered him to a



pier in Newport from whence he planned to sail for England in a frail craft. I fulfilled the contractual obligation in the summer of 1963. (Bill Starkey can tell the story of that crossing. All I

can remember is that Berto, who had earlier taught me to sail with characteristically witty and deathless observations about weather and human behavior, was *very* nervous about what lay ahead.)

Berto sold me his Ghia "as is." Besides filling the cars desperate need for new tires, this meant cleaning out a vehicle that I discovered was jammed full of parking tickets from east coast colleges and universities—from under the seats, between the seats, stuffed behind that car's so-called back seat and in its luggage compartment. Everywhere! They came in all colors and shapes, some with and some without attached envelope for payments. Half a century later I recall one (even) in the form of a polite note asking the guilty party to "kindly refrain from this form of parking in the future." No ticket (of course) had been paid (or paid attention to). In other words, rather than a means of transportation Tappy had purchased an archeological site composed of layers and layers of detritus from Berto's life as a salesman of fine books for learners for W.W. Norton. And this thought occurred to me: was he sailing the Atlantic for pleasure or was he fleeing prosecution?

It all worked out. Berto survived the mighty ocean to opine brilliantly about how campuses and cars, especially one owned by a salesman with a mission, were never meant for each other. He also told me why he had saved the "record." Sadly, I have forgotten his answer. And why didn't I save pieces of the evidence with which to fashion a collage for his library wall? An opportunity lost. But memories aren't lost, and where Berto is concerned, never will be. On- and off-shore he was among the elect, the kind one never forgets.

Brenda Winston — Jane Saunders and I lived in the same building in Harvard Square with Berto. I remember that Berto had the biggest beautiful brown eyes and lots of dark brown hair and as I recall he wore only Brooks Brothers clothes. Also I remember his

handwriting to be so tiny and he had a rich deep voice.

I read a great deal about his grandfather and the music he wrote. Jane and I would hum "Narcissus." I knew some of the words to "Mighty Lak' a Rose" and "The Rosary".

Because Berto was a happy part of my life, I shall think of him every May 17th (Berto's birthday.)

Karen Wyatt — I will always remember the sight of him sailing *Lucero* down the Bay, single-handed, under spinnaker alone – coming into the harbor, dropping the chute and then gliding to his mooring. Perfectly executed, no big deal for him, but awesome for me to watch.

He helped teach me how to sail and more than once "rescued" this young sailor from a thunderstorm in a tippy Brutal Beast. What a guy.

Bruce Zimmerli — I was Bert's sales manager from about 1968 to 1979. I wish I had stayed in contact with him. What an original he was. Here are a few examples:

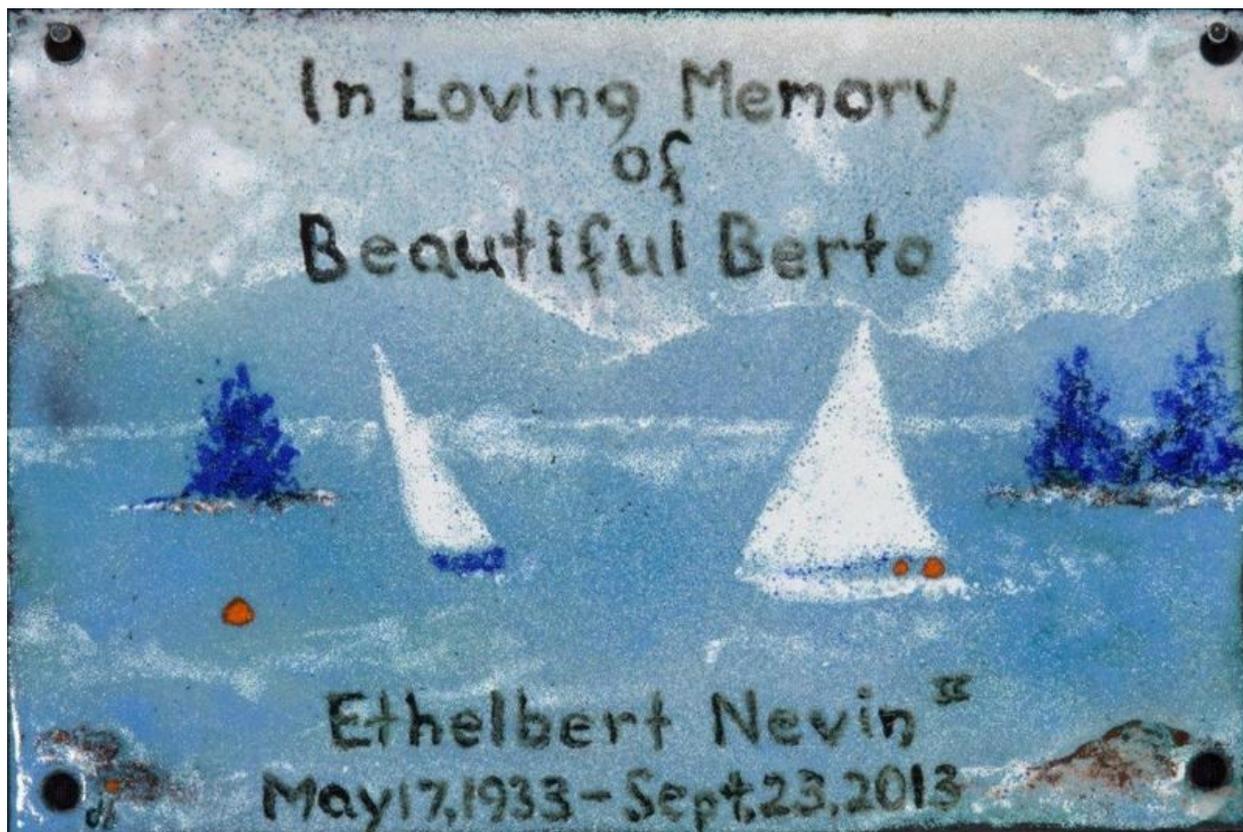
One day when I was calling on professors at a Bay Area

college with Bert, he turned to me and said, "do you suppose metal psychologists work with overwrought iron?"

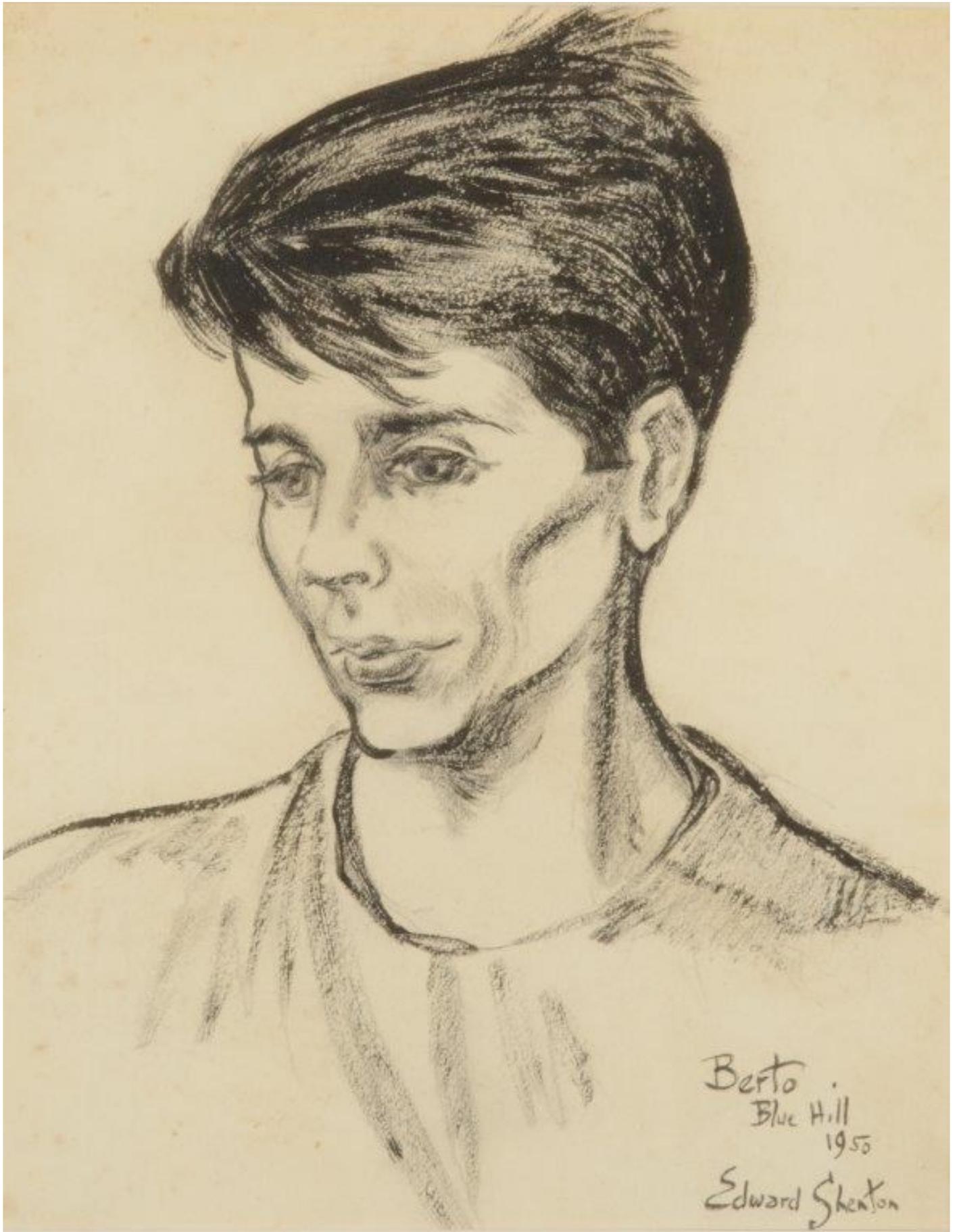
He had been issued a Plymouth Fury as his company car. He had an accident, which prompted him to call the office and say, "I need to vend my Fury, because in venting my fury, I managed to vent my Fury."

At a San Francisco seafood restaurant the waiter asked for his order. Bert said, "carpe diem." He then explained that it was Latin for "fish of the day."

And on to sailing: Some of us were in San Francisco for a Norton sales meeting. Bert took us for a sail around Angel Island on his beautiful, 35-foot wooden sloop. On the lee side of the island all was sunny and warm. After we rounded the island, however, the fog rolled in, temperature and visibility suddenly dropped, and this apparently required Bert to move quickly to adjust the sail. He slipped, and barely caught himself on the lifeline to keep from plunging into that cold water. That ship of fools would never have been able to get the boat to him had he fallen in. Close call.



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