

# The Gilbert's 2023 Christmas Letter



## *Hours of Boredom Interrupted by Moments of Sheer Terror!*

This phrase pilots use to explain their jobs seems to summarize our lives in 2023. It started out with our usual winter enjoyment living aboard our 54' power catamaran at Marina Jack in Sarasota. But this winter was different as we were in preparation for Joel's "bucket list" trip cruising to the Northeast for the summer. We had talked about doing this trip even before we were married 37 years ago, but the real planning began ten years ago when we got serious about finding the right vessel for the trip.

We wanted one large enough to be comfortable living aboard and having several staterooms for guests but not so large that we could not pilot it ourselves. That narrowed the field to power catamarans, and we started out 5 years ago with a 45' Aquila power cat. But finding the salon cramped and a drawer for refrigeration was impossible, so we moved up to Aquila's new 54' model. While only 10' longer, the 54' has almost twice the space of the 45'. We enclosed and conditioned the upstairs bridge making space for a large office space behind the captains' chairs with ample space for us to both have our remote "offices."

In preparation for the long trip, we made several shakedown cruises out of Marina Jack with friends to Venice, Clearwater, and Tarpon Springs, but nothing that fully prepared us for the ~2,000 mile trip



from Sarasota to Mystic, Connecticut. Even though Joel is an accomplished captain with thousands of hours of serious experience, we hired our favorite delivery captain, Dave Hibbard, just in case we had any mechanical challenges ... which we did. Plus, we planned to be running 8 hours each day and captains need a break every few hours from the concentration required to pilot the boat monitoring 8 different gages, 4 large video screens while watching for crab pots, reading the water, monitoring the VHS radio, and offering a "slow pass" to the boats we were overtaking.

It was almost surreal to us that our company, Apogee Interactive, Inc. that we founded and ran for 30-years sold the day before we started this journey. In fact, we did the final closing electronically from the bridge of the boat! Kudos to our

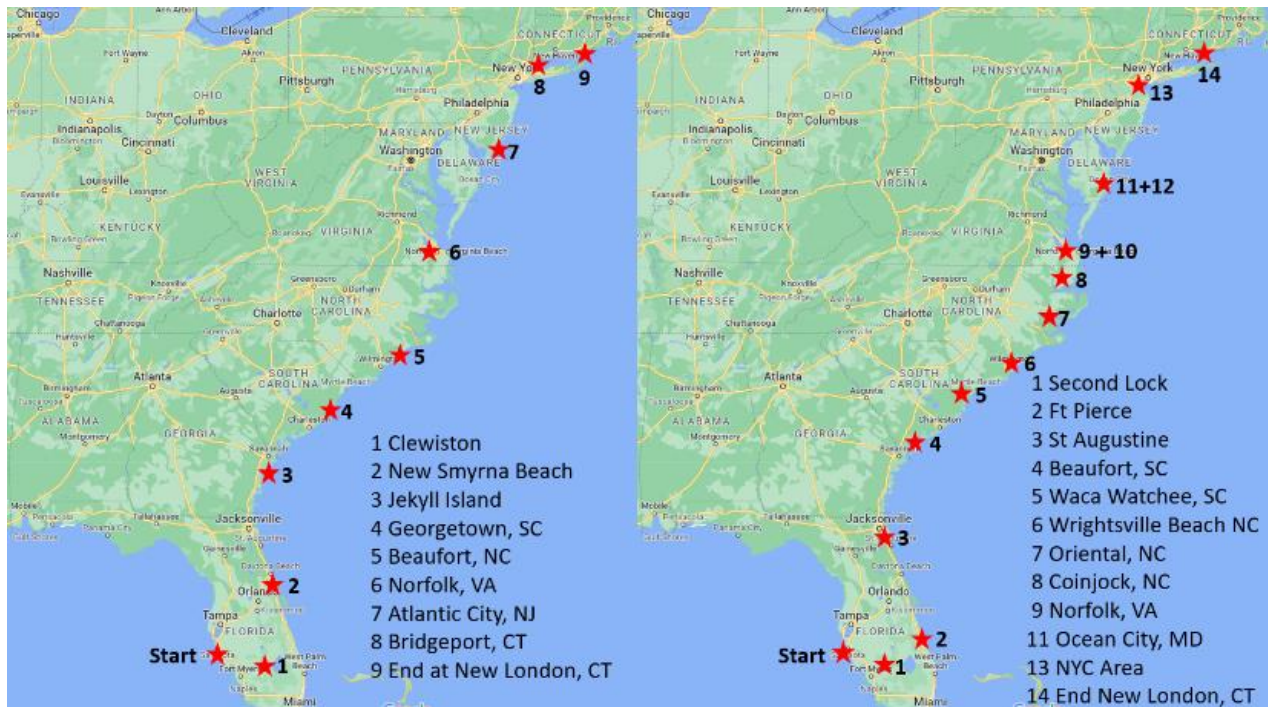
management team for delivering us from day-to-day responsibility one day before our voyage of a lifetime.

As the sun rose over Sarasota, engines running, lines coiled, bumpers in, electrical cables aboard, when Captain Dave Hibbard jumped aboard, we were off. Our first challenge was crossing the Okeechobee, an amazing experience passing through 5 locks and interacting with the Alice in Wonderland characters who controlled them.

It was an intense trip where each day our captains analyzed the weather, wind direction and strength, and constantly adjusted plans to duck storms, make huge open water crossings, and run hard to capture small opportunities for offshore cruising.



In this picture, you can see the planned 9-day trip compared to what required 14-days of hard cruising.



Two unexpected days were spent in protected harbors where we let tornados blow past. The scariest part of the trip was when our captain in Norfolk solemnly announced we were all going to the bridge to don life jackets. Two other days were lost to mechanical issues we encountered.

This shot of the boat taken at one of the marinas along the way gives a good perspective on the size of what we have come to fondly call “The Beast.” It’s name is Interactive, but it is a beast of a boat.





Exhausted but exhilarated, we made it to New London, Connecticut. These are some shots of from the various marinas we overnighted in along the way. While they were all amazing in one way or another, Coinjock was memorable because it was Prom Night and



the marina restaurant, probably the only restaurant in town, was filled with dozens of elegantly-clad young prom-goers.

Much appreciation to the many First Mates who joined us for various legs of the trip. They learned to call ropes “lines” and how to run the auto-pilot controls so our captains could enjoy occasional breaks.

One of our favorite parts of the voyage was Day 13 when we skirted below the Statue of Liberty, passed by Ellis Island, and settled into a marina across from Manhattan. The next day, it was on to Connecticut where we would spend the summer.



The end goal was to spend most of our summer at the Mystic Seaport Museum Marina in lovely Mystic, CT ... yes, the place where Mystic Pizza was filmed. Many of the sights in that film remain in the Mystic Pizza restaurant, which, although a tourist trap, does serve a darn good pizza!

We could write a book about all the wonderful experiences we had this last summer. For most of the summer, we had visitors aboard. Friends from Smoke Rise, neighbors, former employees, business partners, and consultants came and like we, fell in love with Mystic Seaport Museum. It's hard to convey the many things going on almost every day including one morning having a marching band troop by for the Coast Guard Cadet Graduation Ceremony. There must have been 200 uniformed cadets called "Swabs" who just completed the Coast Guard's seven-week initiation equivalent to the Army's Boot Camp. They are the Class of 2027.



What was surprising to all of us watching was the last 20 in the lineup were in casts, on crutches, and some in wheelchairs. We asked what was up with that and were told they usually have 15% to 20% with significant injuries.

Besides daily simulations of life aboard the Charles W. Morgan, the only remaining whaling ship in the world, and the hundreds of Woody cars that showed up from

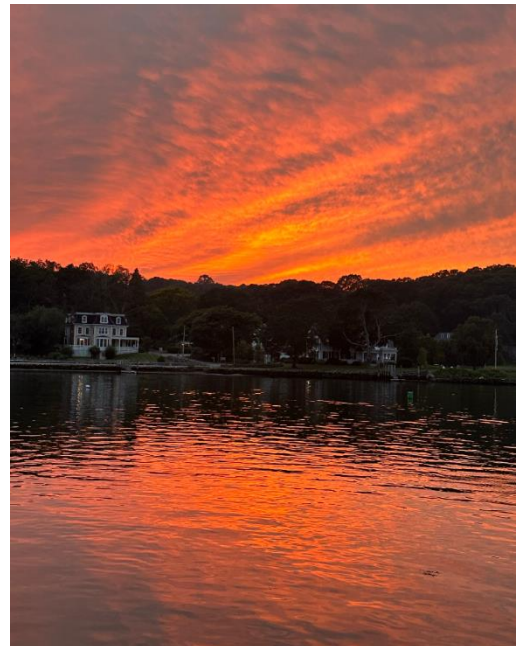
across the country for the car show.

And then there is the recreated seaport village with craftspeople working in 20+ trade shops demonstrating the skills necessary to support the shipping industry 200 years ago. There is a cooper making barrels, a rope shop, sail makers, a blacksmith, ship smiths, woodcarvers, riggers, a compass/sextant shop and so much more.

We even got to crash a wedding that took place at the event tent next to our boat. When our guests danced to their music, a wedding partier shouted, “*Look! The Boat People are Dancing!*”



And we had lots of memorable sunrises and sunsets.



We were treated to several visits from the *Amistad*, the famous slave ship that was built in the Seaport Museum and was featured in the widely acclaimed movie. Anyone who visited us would gleefully remark that they knew precisely where the scenes were shot because it was filmed primarily in the Museum. The views from the marina were also just so picturesque and interesting.

Here is the shot Joel took at dawn one morning as he made his commute to our upstairs office in the bridge.



It was a lucky shot taken before any boats had created ripples on the water. That is the *Amistad* to the left, the three-masted *Charles W. Morgan* is just behind them. To the right is *Fire Fighter*, a magnificent vessel retired here after its last heroic job fighting the 911 fires at the Twin Towers. It is lovingly maintained by retired New York City fireman who come up, polish the brass guns and give tours. They seemed to be polishing the guns every day all summer, and then we learned why. They were preparing for the August 26th celebration honoring our first responders and Fireboat FIRE FIGHTER's 85th birthday. We felt fortunate to be docked right beside it for the half day performance by the water cannons.



The picture below is a shot off the port side early another morning.





Waking each day to see the mist rising off the Mystic River and watching the scullers cutting briskly through the water are memories we cherish. Later in the day, the summer camp kids learning to sail cover the river in their small colorful boats. If you have kids or grandkids, I encourage you to check out the summer camp programs offered at the Seaport Museum.



The kids live aboard a 200-year-old ship in the bunks used by sailors, and over their 5 days at camp, learn sailing, rowing, boating safety and much more. I have been told they sell out, so if you are interested, check them out on the website. If they now say sold out, they have not been updated since last year, so don't give up.



Those of you who know Joel know he is an avid fisherman. I tell people he doesn't *fish*, he *catches*. I've rarely seen him *not* catch the fish he is looking for. Many nights, hearing some kind of magical calling, he would jump up, grab his ready-rigged rod and on the first cast would pull in a huge striper.

We were fortunate that our boat was in the marina when they did the drone footage for their magazine cover. Click [here](#) to link to it.

That's our boat at the lower-left on the cover. If you flip through the magazine to the back cover you will then see just how massive the museum grounds are. It's over 20 acres.

Having experienced what we did this summer, we decided one summer was not enough, so left the boat in storage in Mystic for this winter so we can enjoy one more summer there. Please let us know if you'd like to visit and in what timeframe so we can track our reservations. If you prefer staying on the land, there are lots of boutique hotels near the Museum we can recommend where you could stay and come for day trips to our boat and to the museum. We are hoping many of you will grace us with your time to visit.

We drove home to Atlanta in October and are keeping busy with the Smoke Rise Country Club, our church Sunday School where Joel is a regular teacher, Joel's many Christmas concerts, and writing for our local newspaper. It has been a whirlwind of activities that are just now beginning to settle down as the year ends. Joel's last performance was this morning, a Christmas Eve service for Briarlake Baptist Church.



He plays in 4 orchestras, but his favorite is the Sarasota Pops where this shot was taken. He also serves on their Board of Directors. Below is him at the left playing the bassoon backing up the strings at our Smoke Rise church concert.



Stephen is in his second year working as a software engineer for LexisNexis, a company that sells data analytics products and databases that are accessed through online portals, including portals for computer-assisted legal research, newspaper search, and consumer information. His work is timely as it focuses on the use of artificial intelligence, something that Joel has extensive experience with from his days of doing mathematical predictive modeling of energy systems. Their dinner conversations about bias in the training set and manipulation of messaging are not for the faint of heart. We appreciate him being home managing the house for us while we are away.

