

The Gilbert's 2024 Christmas Letter



Magical Mystic

Inspired by our experience living aboard *Interactive* in the Mystic Seaport Museum Marina during summer of 2023, we spent the winter months in our home workshop finishing a model boat. Not just any model boat. When we cleaned out a downstairs storeroom and came across a 3' long sealed cardboard box. Upon opening it, Joel was pleased to see the wooden hull he had purchased at a garage sale in Maine when he was in his 20s. So, here we are looking at a treasure he had moved probably 14 times from apartments to houses in its sealed box.



Seeing it and appreciating its elegant lines hand-carved by a skilled craftsman from a single piece of maple, Joel got to work finding plans for completing the model of an 1800s-hundred-foot Brigantine cargo ship. It was just a hull, nothing more. After days of research and setting up both a CNC carving machine and a 3D printer, he was ready to go to work.

The most tedious parts were laying down the individual planks for the wooden deck, coloring the lines between them to indicate caulking, and tying hundreds of tiny knots for the rat lines. I made the two small white lifeboats fastened to the upper deck. We ordered them online as kits with 14 tiny slats not much larger than a flattened toothpick that had to be glued, puttied,

painted then distressed. It took about 4 months to get it to the stage shown here. We still have some work to do on the rigging but will get to that as we have time this winter.

In our 2023 Christmas Letter, we shared the two-week April adventure of piloting our Aquila power catamaran *Interactive* from Sarasota to Mystic, Connecticut. That letter is posted on our website if you missed it at www.waterfallhouse.net. Our plan was to reverse the trip 6-months later in October '23 but mid-summer, we were enjoying it so much, we decided to leave the boat in storage over the winter and return for one more summer. While we loved Connecticut's beautiful scenery, cool weather, and the peace of living on the water, the most fun was entertaining and sharing time with friends and family who visited us there. So because many of them said they would come visit again, we put the boat in storage in downtown Mystic again so we can use it there summer of '25 and possibly beyond.

A Silver Lining

We were disappointed to learn we could not keep the boat in Mystic as we did most of the summer '23. The marina can only handle about 20 boats, and to make it available to more boaters, they implemented a new policy that you can only spend two weeks there at a time. That required we have a backup marina, which we found in Old Saybrook. The disappointment was short lived because, like lots of seemingly bad news, there was a silver lining. Being in Old Saybrook where there is no 20-acre maritime museum to entertain us, we began doing some sightseeing excursions into the surrounding areas.

We found the most amazing storybook towns of which our favorite was Essex. Driving in, you feel like you are entering a Currier and Ives Christmas card. Many of our visitors made day trips there and some even stayed a few nights at the 250-year-old Griswold Inn pictured below after leaving our boat. From the Inn, they could walk to the world's shortest ferryboat ride across the marina to an adorable restaurant, *Sirens*. If you want to walk the streets without going, just click this picture to see a wonderful video of the town and surrounding area. [Or Click Here.](#)



Then there is Gillette Castle, the curious monstrosity hanging over the Connecticut River. It was the home of William Gillette who was famous for creating the stage character Sherlock Holmes. Another popular side trip was taking the 4-hour steam train and riverboat excursion up the Connecticut River.

Back to the Museum

In May, one of the first big events at the Museum was the departure of the world's largest Viking ship the *Draken Harald Hårfagre* pictured here as it was leaving after several years of restoration at the shipyard. We met the Norwegian captain and his crew and heard their presentations of the experience sailing the ship from its home in Norway to the Mystic Museum Restoration Shipyard a few years ago. They



waved goodbye to us as they left the Museum headed to Rhode Island where it would be loaded on a cargo ship for the return home to Norway.

The Mystic Museum is the world's most famous historical preservation site for wooden boats of historical significance. They come here from all over the world to be renovated ... not replicated. This is an amazing process of taking almost all the rotten or broken planks out of the boat and then fitting new ones to replace them. The shipbuilding skills used here preserve not only the physical essence of the ship, but also act as a real-world modern training school for those who do this work all around the world. Some of our visitors this summer were serious woodworkers and Joel arranged "behind the scenes" tours of the shipyard and conversations with the artisans (shipwrights) who work there.



Another ship that was new to the shipyard this summer was the *Susan Constant*, which is a replica of the ship taking the first settlers to the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia.

As a floating maritime classroom owned and operated by the State of Connecticut, the slave ship *Amistad* was in the Museum quite a bit this summer. It was built by the State of Connecticut following the success of the Spielberg movie by the same name. The movie was filmed primarily in the Mystic Seaport Museum making it fun to watch after being there because you recognize many of the buildings and backgrounds. We were thrilled to be able to board the *Amistad* with several of our visitors when it came back into the Museum for repairs.

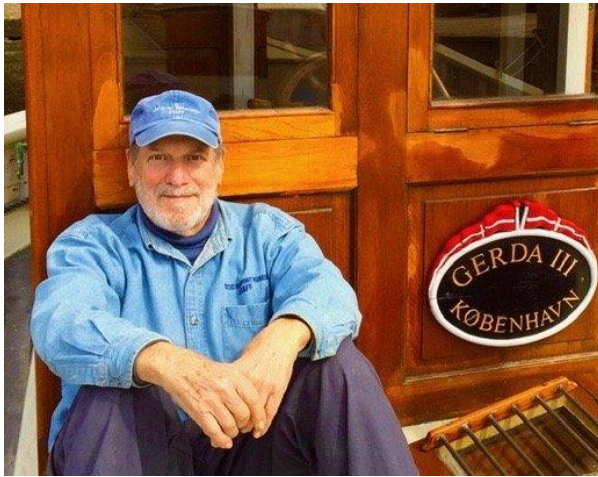
Volunteering

We volunteered when we were in the Mystic Marina in the Museum. Joel worked mostly in the Navigational Instruments shop where he taught visitors how to use a sextant and shared the story of how critical accurate timekeeping was for mariners to know their longitude at sea. Getting latitude was easy ... but longitude was almost impossible until accurate timekeeping aboard ship was possible. Without it, many ships were lost. It was so critical a problem to solve, England's Royal Naval Society offered the Longitude Prize with an award of \$3 million dollars in today's money. Winning the competition in 1764 with his H4 Sea Watch, John Harrison had spent 45 years, most all his professional career, perfecting and proving his device worked.



Joel also got authorized to be a docent on the Museum's flagship, the *Charles W. Morgan*. It's the last wooden whaling ship in the world and most every visitor to the Museum goes aboard to walk the decks and tour below to see how the 40+ crew lived on voyages, most lasting 3 to 5 years. My volunteering is at the Welcome Center giving guests directions and helping them figure out what to see.

Meeting Howard and Lorraine Veisz

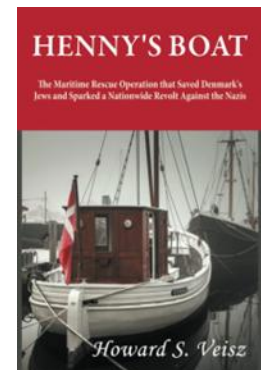


A high point of our summer was meeting Howard Veisz and his wife Lorraine. He is a retired attorney and author of our favorite book, *Henny's Boat*. We had heard rumors from other volunteers of this legendary man who volunteered in the museum and on occasion gave lectures about the Gerda III. He had become enamored with her story and after working for several years on the restoration of the Charles W. Morgan, he began looking after the Gerda. As he learned more about her history, he decided to write a book about

her role toward the end of WW II. When it was successful, he decided to go to Denmark to interview her children and relatives of Henny Sinding.

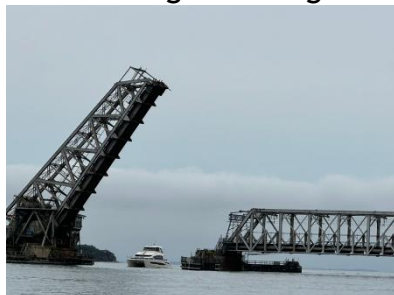
She has a remarkable and inspiring story. The Danish Parliament gave Gerda III, a 40' wooden boat used to tend the lighthouse between Denmark and Sweeden, to the Manhattan Jewish Historical Society to be preserved and to share her story. It was in appreciation for her service helping 7,700 Jews, 95% of Denmark's Jewish population, escape to Sweden in 1943 as the Nazis came to take them to death camps.

The Historical Society was delighted with the gift, but they had no place to keep a large wooden boat in Manhattan. They asked if Mystic would take her for a year or so while they found a home for her. That was 23 years ago, and the proud little wooden boat is gradually rotting away as she floats in the Museum. Howard does what he can to keep her afloat, and we are looking forward to working with him in 2025 on the fundraising it will take to get her pulled and fully restored. If you are interested in the story, you can purchase *Henny's Boat* on Amazon for \$18.50 or let me know and I will get you a copy. We'd like to have it made into a movie.



Voyages Between Old Saybrook & Mystic Seaport Museum

All our visitors rated the trips between our two marinas as the high point of their visit. The 4-mile run along the Mystic River with its charming 1800s buildings and winding roads clustered into fishing villages. Then the open water run in Long Island Sound to the Connecticut River offered dramatic views plus an experience of being at sea. Hailing the bridge tenders on the VHS radio to request passage plus the tedious dance-of-the-boats maneuvering as we waited for the opening offered our visitors the full experience of what is like to take a trip on this vessel.



The undocking and docking procedures were handled by our visitors under Captain Joel's direction and gave them firsthand experience and appreciation for handling a 40+ ton boat. Our captain also occasionally took a side trip

to nearby Rhode Island to show them Watch Hill and Taylor Swift's modest house right next to the magnificent Ocean House hotel. >>>

Summer in Mystic Museum

In April, our friend Captain Mike moved the boat from our storage marina about 1 mile away back to the Mystic Seaport Museum Marina where they had allowed us to stay for the whole month because few boats are out in May. We learned the "season" is June 22 when school is out to end of August. I can't figure out how to make the math work on running a business there with 10-weeks to turn a profit. But apparently, they do.



First week in May, we did the two-day drive from Atlanta to Mystic stopping to overnight with long-time friends Robert and Susan Mitchell at their scenic family-farm compound in West Virginia. And yes, if you worked with either Susan at A&C, A&C Enercom, EEI, TEC, or Apogee, your ears were burning as we relived so many of the amazing experiences and wonderful acquaintances we shared over our careers.

Arriving in Mystic, our first job on the boat was getting the heat running. It was still quite cold there. We didn't turn the heat off until the end of June and then only for a few weeks before we needed it again. The air conditioning ran a few hours maybe 3 days total. Next, we prepared the two guest staterooms for visitors. We had 30 come over the summer and several of them were repeat visitors from 2023 all of which we thoroughly enjoyed.

Our visitors were charmed by the early morning rowing skulls that slip silently past our boat, the stream of summer campers in small, colorful sailboats most of the day, and the occasional passing of Novelty, an impeccably maintained old wooden Chris-Craft used for tours.



Then, there were the occasional model sailboat races right next to our vessel ... offering our guests a front row seat better than anyone else to watch these very serious sailors maneuver their large remote-control sailboats. The people operating these racers are uber serious we observed.



One of our favorite memories of the summer was picnicking with friends with the red-and-white-checked Walmart tablecloth on wooden tables at the famous Abbott's Lobster House and other roadside stands selling all versions of lobster and seafood.



We usually ended every visit with a celebration dinner at the famed *S&P Oyster House*. All oyster lovers agreed they serve the world's best oysters. Then there were the trips to *Ocean House* in Watch Hill, Rhode Island. Located just three doors down from Taylor Swift's mansion in the northeast, the Ocean House is in good company. We usually took the 30-minute drive to have brunch or an early dinner there. Seated in the restaurant overlooking the beach we watched croquet players dressed head to toe in white play exhilarating matches on the green. After dining, we often walked the hotel to see the



spectacular ocean views and to take in the incredible oil paintings on display and for sale along the hallways.

Many of our trips to Rhode Island included a stop at Dave's Coffee Shop to resupply our Dave's Quinone Coffee. Our friend at the Museum, Maud Bailey, introduced us to Dave's in May and we quickly became devotees. The label calls its flavor as "Buttery, Pecan, and Smooth."

That about sums it up. Now that we are home, we order it online. It's more expensive than the coffee we get at Publix, but it is far better.



Back Home

As the summer was coming to an end, having spent most of it with visitors on the boat, we again decided to leave the boat in Mystic for more summers in Connecticut. What makes it so special is having friends come to share their time with us and getting to experience the magic of Mystic and the surrounding areas together. We do hope some will come again and others will come for the first time. Let me know if you would like to know the schedule for when we plan to be aboard summer '25.

This winter, Joel will continue work on the photogrammetry project he is doing for the Museum helping them develop a production path for digitizing their collection of 600 wooden boats and their millions of artifacts from our country's era in pursuit of whales.

Stephen is in his third year working as a software engineer with LexisNexis. He lives at home, works at home, and has only met his co-workers twice when they have gotten together for lunch. While we would prefer he be in a more social setting, we are grateful to have him home holding down the fort, watering the plants, and managing visits by the exterminator.

My days are packed with projects. The big one this year was incorporating into our property the half-acre the previous owner purchased years ago from the Country Club. It began in January when I had the 40 yards of chain link fence moved to the new property line. Then came tree removal, stump grinding, and getting a master plan for hardscape and pathways connecting the new gardens with the existing ones. In October, the hardscape and pathways were complete. The first week in January, plants go in, irrigation is installed, and landscape lighting will finish it for now. Currently, it is a mud pit.



Joel and I both love writing our monthly articles for the *Smoke Signal*, our local newspaper, and helping with our Discovery Class at church where he is a co-teacher and I manage communications and socials. I enjoy my role in fundraising for Tim Echols' campaign for the Public Service Commission and for the Developmental Disabilities Ministry (DDM).



Joel continues to play in several orchestras. He is now on the Board of Directors for one of his favorites, the Sarasota Pops. Pictured here is their December performance featuring Tiffany Haas who played "Glinda" in the Broadway production of *Wicked*. The orchestra is conducted by one of our favorite people, Robyn Bell. It was exhilarating. You can see a recording of it by clicking on the picture. [Or Clicking Here.](#)

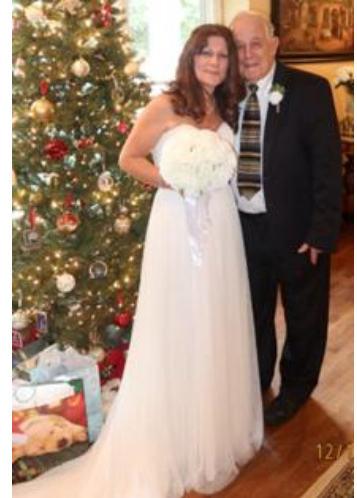
Wrapping Up the Year

Natalie & Proud Dad >>

After 22 years together thinking about it, Rudy and Joel's daughter, Natalie, tied the knot in December with a lovely wedding at their fabulous Wieuca Rd home in Buckhead. Sister Sue Liddy flew in from California to join us and ~30 friends and relatives for the long-awaited and much-anticipated occasion.

<< Susan, Joel, Sue Liddy, and Stephen Gilbert

We ran a Zoom meeting for the relatives and friends who could not make it.



Beautiful bride, handsome couple, and two of the nicest people you will ever meet. We are so happy for them!

We were leaving for Sarasota the next day and were thrilled that they wanted to join us for a week-long honeymoon aboard our 54' Aquila, *Gratitude*, in Sarasota. Marina Jack was

charging us for the slip even though *Interactive* was in Mystic, so we put her new sister boat in the Marina Jack slip.

So, now you can visit us either in Connecticut in the summer or in Sarasota during the winter. We hope to have lots of visitors to both places. Let us know if you would like to visit. They are very different experiences, and I can't say one is better than the other. Both places are incredible.



Merry Christmas & Wishing You All the Best for 2025!

Joel, Susan, and Stephen Gilbert



Fun Memories of 2024



Graham Can Fish!



Our favorite wine snob at S&P



That's Howard, our favorite author, in the pink shirt visiting with us and some of our longtime friends who wanted to meet him.

The shortest ferryboat ride in the world in Essex taking guests from town to the marina restaurant, Sirens. On and off in about 10 seconds.



Kanawha-connected friends off for an afternoon of fun on the Essex Steam Train and Riverboat outing on the Connecticut River.



Dinner at the Inn at Mystic's rooftop restaurant overlooking the Mystic River.

This is the hotel visitors have stayed at when visiting and wanting to stay on dry land.



We were running with the big dogs this day in Mystic. That's a 120' yacht in the background and the Charles W Morgan behind it.

Beautiful sunset viewed from the upper aft deck & wine bar.



