

March 2010



### **Big Boat Build - Participant Testimonial**

“A dark, damp Wednesday late last November found myself and my brother Derry wending our way to West Cork to participate in a boat-building workshop. When the AK ILEN was located by Gary MacMahon and returned to Ireland from Las Malvinas, I had helped out in various small ways to fit her out and sail her from Dublin Bay ‘around the corner’ back home to West Cork where she was built in 1926. A fond memory in that summer of 1998 is of sailing into Cape Clear’s North Harbour to a welcoming chorus of the island school kids singing “Trasna na dTonnta, dul siar, dul siar ...”

Although my grandfather, Thade Murphy, was a carpenter, the chippy genes had skipped my generation. Indeed, my grandad and his brother, Jer, had worked in Skinner’s boatyard, Baltimore in the 1930s. They were both employed by Macroom Engineering Works as carpenters and their employer, Frances St Aubyn Horgan, wanted his own best men finishing the internal woodwork when he sent his own boat to Skinner’s for a re-fit.

We arrived on a Wednesday evening to a warm welcome by our hosts, Mary Ann and Eugene, in the Oldcourt Inn. After a number of sociable pints, we retreated to our beds overhead the pub – a very civilised arrangement indeed. The morning came all too soon. Mary Ann fuelled us up for the day ahead with a hearty breakfast. Hegarty’s yard is literally across a field out the back. It is a treasure trove of a place, complete with an O’Driscoll castle jumbled together with a half-decker here, a couple of hookers there, a stack of 5-inch thick oak planking yonder.

The Hegarty brothers, Liam and John and Fachtna O’Sullivan made everyone feel at home. After a quick tour, Gary suggested that I fill in the rents, i.e. the cracks in the wooden frames, using a mixture of oil paint and putty. My brother Derry went off on some errand or other to Baltimore while I got on with being Gary’s rent boy.

By the time Derry returned, Leo and Kieran had taken me under their wing and I was promoted to using a sander, plane and chisel. The whole process of taking a mould from the existing 80 year old frame, transcribing it to a huge oak plank and carving out the new frame initially by chainsaw was fascinating. Many hours were invested into each rough-hewn new frame to get the bevels bang on and hone each one to the precise, complex, three-dimensional, curved shape required. A little like Eve being created (allegedly) from Adam’s rib, bits of my DNA are forevermore part of the ILEN’s number one and number two frames.

Some memories – pints in the Oldcourt Inn - dripping fried egg sandwiches (eggs expertly fried by Leo on his wok) for brunch – getting battleship grey paint all over my clothes – watching John Hegarty steaming and shaping planks for the wooden dinghy taking shape before our very eyes at the far end of the shed – the best chowder ever, made by Mary Ann from fish freshly caught by her husband - an informal walk around the boatyard with Liam Hegarty and him oozing knowledge and boat lore – blisters – being challenged by Mary Ann “What’s the matter with you, boy?” when, not being a carnivore, I left meat uneaten on my plate - more pints in the Oldcourt Inn.

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My carpentry genes were re-discovered, but don't tell my wife! Get involved, you will enjoy it. The keel and frames are complete, but there's planking and decking to come, not to mention spars and rigging and much, much more. Can't wait to experience again belting in to Baltimore in a force 7 with the full compliment of sails ballooning - this time without the cleats popping and having to hammer them hurriedly back into the frames with 6-inch nails.."

**Paul Murphy, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick**