



ESTABLISHED 1872

SANTA BARBARA YACHT CLUB

Peter Churchill, 2003

Local boy Peter Churchill grew up near Turnpike and Old San Marcos Roads. He attended Goleta Union School, followed by Santa Barbara Junior High and High Schools. The Santa Barbara Peter and his two older sisters grew up in was a little different than the one we know today. Homes were not built as closely together. One could not quickly walk into town or to the house of a friend. “Living out in the country, your friends were far away, but there was always something to do; you had to entertain yourself.” One of the ways in which Peter would pass the long, lazy days of summer was to go fishing with his dad—one of the elder Churchill’s favorite pastimes.

But it wasn’t until Peter was grown that he became really involved in boating. His brother-in-law, John Yabsley, started sailing a 15-foot Snipe that the two would tool around in. At the time, there was much small boat activity in the Santa Barbara harbor—Flatties (Geary 18s), Snipes, Mercurys, and some Stars. John and Peter joined the Flattie fleet sometime around 1964. “It was a well-organized group. We had a summer schedule that started in May. We sailed on the ocean and on lakes, and there was a big Memorial Day Regatta.”

Peter clearly prefers sailboating to powerboating. He owned several Flatties through the years; in one of these, *Citation*, he placed second in a Geary 18 international regatta held in Oregon. He continued racing *Citation* in many regattas until 1977, when he sold the boat.

Peter joined SBYC in 1971 at the encouragement of friends including Al Schmidt, Doug Wilson and Pinky Cooke. Two years later, Peter and Sherry were married, joining five teenagers to become a “blended family”. The next few years left little leisure time and were spent mostly on the home front, with Peter building additional bedrooms to accommodate his newly-formed clan.

When Peter had a little more time to sail, he crewed on *Prime Time*, off and on, from 1980 until 1990, when he bought Doug Wilson’s partnership share in the boat. He jumped back in with both feet and still races Wet Wednesdays to this day.

Going through the chairs proved to be a very positive experience for both Peter and Sherry. They embraced the more serious responsibilities as wholeheartedly as the fun, social ones required of them. The treasured memories of those years include hosting no fewer than eight Navy ships and their officers at the Club—including the commander in chief of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet—as well as the Swiss ambassador to the U.S. and his wife.

This commodore, owner of Churchill Sheet Metal and Heating (a family-owned business since 1931), has been involved in, and the catalyst for, many of the physical improvements to the clubhouse and grounds. In fact, when I asked him what he considers his special contributions to SBYC, he grinned and said, “I’m Heri’s helper! There are always things that need fixing and I’m a hands-on kind of guy. For example, the flagpole was in such bad shape. I fiber glassed it and reinforced it. Heri and I made those sheds by the Cooke Pavilion. They had been just fences with gates; one side was for trash, the other a ‘catch-all’. Through the years, we added copper roofs, etc., and moved the trash to its present site at the far end of the parking lot. The steel-tubed gate that separated the grounds from the rest of the harbor was falling apart. I replaced that. It’s solid now.” It’s easy to agree that Peter feels strongly about our Club, maintaining and improving it wherever necessary in a professional, forward-thinking manner.

His commodore's ball reflected his respect for maintaining and reinforcing tradition. Peter had invited 14 family members to join him and his wife Sherry in the Yacht Club dining room—their table expanded practically the length of the room! The head table was draped in the family's traditional Irvine tartan reflecting Peter's Scottish heritage. Entertainment for the evening included fabulous bagpipe music by the six-member Pacific Coast Highlander Pipe Band and two Highland Fling dancers. This was a particularly appropriate way to mark the end of Peter's year at the helm since, as some might remember, his opening day began with the main piper from the band welcoming members and visitors to the Club with festive bagpipe music.

Needless to say, Peter credits our Club with offering the opportunity to create friendships. "That's the biggest thing the Club offers. As commodore, I tried not to let cliques run things. I don't like that. It should be a club for everyone. I fought hard not to let that happen. It's important that we all try to include everyone.

"That's one thing my brother-in-law was good at. Anyone who walked into the Club, he made them feel welcome. It never hurts to make someone feel good. This Club should make people feel at ease; it just makes for better vibes.

"That's the biggest thing our members can do. Always keep that in mind." Peter's idea of the SBYC ambiance is one that many of us agree with and are happy to proactively maintain. When was the last time you walked up those stairs and were greeted with a frown? If it should ever happen, take a lead from Peter—smile and help that person to remember that our Club is a place to relax, have fun, and sometimes just sit down, breathe, and look out at the dolphins. You'll both walk away feeling lighter.

Around 2004 he took on the firing of the Jefferson Cannon for the SBYC Opening Day celebrations. It was one of his favorite ways to volunteer and he did it every year up through 2020.

Peter passed away February 5, 2021.

