

Lance Leonard Brown, 1947-2008

by Justin Nobel

Lance Leonard Brown, a sailing enthusiast who built homes in West Marin, repaired the Inverness Boat House and once navigated a 20-foot sailboat to Mexico relying only on the fruits of the sea for food, passed away last week at the age of 60.

"He loved to sail," said daughter Michelle Brown. "He loved to build stuff and he could fix anything"

Lance was born September 16, 1947 and spent most of his youth in Richmond. He grew up with two sisters and a brother and moved to Inverness in his early 20s where he spent much of his life. He helped raise three daughters, Rebecca, Michelle and Leah.

He held a variety of jobs, working at the boat launch on Tomales Bay. For a time he worked for Dirt Brothers, a locally-owned construction company. He also helped rebuild the Inverness Boat House.

Lance played pitcher on the Pacific Slopes, a softball team that held weekly games at West Marin School. He wrote articles for *The Tomales Times* about his travels, including one titled "This Little Ship Came Home," about an epic trip to Mexico on a 20-foot wooden sailboat with friend Danny Joslin. They left from Inverness with only three Snickers bars for food and caught fish to supplement their diet. When they finally reached Mexico they naively landed at a military base. Soldiers pointed their guns at them but by the end of the night the storm-tossed Inverness sailors were sharing beers with the troops.

While living in Inverness, Lance kept a rowboat at Chicken Ranch beach which he used to paddle out to a 30-foot wooden sailboat moored offshore, the "Tomales Princess." He enjoyed taking friends and family out into the bay.

"We would leave really early in the morning and sail to Shell Beach to watch the Water Dogs' swimming lessons," remembered Michelle.

Sometimes, the girls and their father anchored the sloop off Hog Island, and fished for salmon near the mouth of the bay. The boat had a small cabin with little beds and they spent the night onboard, falling asleep to the lull of the waves.

A big adventure for the children was rowing the dingy ashore to dig up clams and explore the beaches.

On another occasion, he rowed a small boat from Inverness to Sausalito. "He rode tug boat waves for awhile and when he got tired he rowed back," said Leah.

In 1998, Lance left Inverness and traveled the West in an old Winnebago. Michelle and

For and Aft...

Opening day on San Francisco Bay, and The Fearless was there.

Dan Joslin and I sailing through this celebration of thousands of vessels trying to determine how many beer cans had already sunk (judging from the numbers still afloat).

Many boats: large luxurious cruisers, old wooden sailing vessels, fiberglass class boats, row boats, surfboards with sails. I wouldn't have been surprised to see a sailing inner tube.

Among the celebrants The Fearless sailed, bound for Tomales Bay. Darkness came. The party was behind us, and against the last of an incoming tide we motored through the gate.

Shortly after midnight, the sails were set – the Pacific Ocean beneath the keel.

The winds were steady and brisk from the northwest. The swells were about 12 feet, and the Pacific (or peaceful) Ocean didn't seem all that peaceful. Nor did my stomach.

Dan agreed to the first watch and a tack to the west. I nearly emptied my stomach on the lee, went below, and promptly fell asleep.

I was awakened by a crash and the sound of water running into the cabin.

With the awakening came the realization that the winds had increased, and then the winds were on me – the howl

in one ear and Dan's voice in the other. The Fearless was coming about. I came up on deck. The cockpit was half full of water.

Dan told of a sea breaking over The Fearless, apparently jarring the cabin hatch loose because the next gust blew it away. We ran with the wind, looking for the hatch, lost and gone.

We once again came about and took our westerly tack, this time sailing an open boat. Dan was still on watch. I went below, slept greedily, awoke to darkness – still sick, came on deck, hung over the lee for awhile, then took my watch as Dan went for sleep.

Tiller in hand, wind in my face, and stars in my eyes – all on this moving black sea. I felt good, and The Fearless felt good, decks awash as often as not, heeling under too much sail.

On occasion, two swells would join efforts and push The Fearless very high – only to dive off into the trough. She seemed to love it. No moans, groans, or pounding – except from Dan who would experience weightlessness when she fell off one of these swells.

He would then drop against his bunk in the bow when The Fearless reached the trough.

The sky gave evidence a new day was dawning. The blackness slipped away. The winds lessened slightly. Dan was up on

by Lance Brown

deck and the Point Reyes lighthouse was in sight.

We spent the day trying to get around the point in steadily rising winds. But with so much sail, we were being set, so by mid-afternoon we were about 12 miles off the point, nearing the Farallones.

With the rising winds, it became apparent that we could not make it around the point, so we came about and headed for the protection of Drake's Bay.

In the few short hours it took us to reach Drake's Bay, the winds had reached about 30 miles per hour. Once in Drake's, we dropped sails with some muttering and growling at the wind, at seas which made this a difficult, wet job. And we motored up to the beach with the other boats seeking shelter.

Once below: cook, eat, dry out, hope friends understand we are safe in Drake's Bay and not at sea in this nasty weather, sleep.

Tuesday morning: calm sea, no wind. We motor around the point and pick up a light breeze. Sail to Tomales Bay. Motor through the mouth on a very calm outgoing tide.

A leisurely, restful sail in light winds and warm sun to Inverness. Feet on earth... home.

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Leah received postcards from Alaska, Colorado and Fresno. Eventually, he sold the RV and ended up in Los Molinos, a small farming town south of Redding, where he passed away.

Lance's sometimes spontaneous impulse to travel affected his daughters.

Six years ago, Michelle enlisted in the army. "I wanted to get out and see the world," she said.

She is part of the 705th Explosive Ordinance Disposal division and just finished her second tour in Iraq. She is currently at Fort Polk, Louisiana where her term of service will end in March.

"I used to talk to my dad about the army all the time," said Michelle. Lance spent time in the Air Force in the 1960s, although he was never shipped overseas.

The daughter and her father exchanged dog tags and Michelle continues to wear his.

"He always wanted me to send him hats and pins and patches," said Michelle. "Ev-

erybody back home would always tell me, 'oh, your father is so proud.'"

Leah traveled far afield as well. She packed her belongings in a horse trailer and moved to Florida, where she lives about five miles from the beach in a small town called Navarre, near Pensacola. She owns a 1938 wooden sailboat that looks just like the one Lance took to Mexico.

"I saw it on the side of the road with a For Sale sign and I thought, 'what the heck,'"

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where people would appreciate the natural environment," said Jacqueline Mallegni, one of the three creators of the installation. "There is this part of being human that interfaces with nature. We are so much a part of it, and it is a part of us."

The series of art installations associated with the Stegner conference started as a brainstorming session on the part of Steve Costa, owner of Point Reyes Books and the conference director, and Suzanne d'Coney, the conference coordinator.

"We were thinking about various panels and different ways to express or inter-

said Leah.

She paid \$700 for the boat, which is made of redwood and spruce and was built in Scotland. She also changed the name, from "The Scotsman" to "Tomales Princess."

"I got my love of the ocean from him," said Leah.

Lance is survived by his daughters Leah Barbo, Michelle Brown and the late Rebecca Brown as well as numerous friends across West Marin.

pret Stegner's philosophy," d'Coney said. "At one point in the conversation, we realized visual art would add a whole different dimension to the conference instead of just talking."

The series of shows was arranged through a partnership between the Tomales Bay Library Association and Gallery Route One. Funding came in part from a grant by the Marin Arts Council. People were invited to submit proposals for projects, which were reviewed by a jury of local artists.

"Friends and people who had heard about it contacted me. They thought my work was so appropriate to the subject that I should apply," said Mallegni, who was not previously familiar with Stegner's work. "His reference to the geography of hope spoke to me and resonated



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