

'The Admiral'

A reminiscence from the May Cruise

By PETER ANDREWS

GEOFFREY had an enormous capacity for love: love for his beloved Anne, whom he called "Shorty", his family, his friends, his God and perhaps his equally beloved Bahamas. Fittingly, Geoff and Anne were participants in the very first cruise held in May 1979 under the guise of exploring the far flung southern islands on behalf of the Bahamas National Trust. Their vessel was aptly named 'Skylarkin'. They were joined by Basil and Paula Kelly on 'Saga Boy' and Charlie and Brenda Bethell on 'Pretty Girl'. The first trip travelled through the Exuma and Jumento Cays on to Mira por Vos, Hogsty Reef and Plana Cays, to Acklins, Rum Cay, Conception Island and safely back to Nassau – all in 20 days.

The yachts were 54 feet and under, provisions for fuel were scarce or non-existent, there were no cell phones, GPSs and only several available channels on the single side band radios. Exploring and discovery at its fundamental best. From this small beginning grew the annual cruise with the same purpose: to explore the land we love.

Geoffrey was the Vice Admiral and served as such for ten years. His major role was to plan the itinerary along with the captains of the joining vessels and to be in charge of the various forms of fellowship and conviviality as the journey continued. Perhaps no one known to me loved a good party more than Geoff, and if music were part of the evening so much the better. He and Shorty traditionally hosted a fish chowder evening aboard Skylarkin with great joy and welcoming spirit.

In 1991, Basil Kelly retired as Admiral and Geoff was unanimously selected to succeed him. Our voyage that year passed through Exuma to George Town, then over to northern Long Island, Conception, Cat Island, Little Island and back through the Exumas and home. A wonderful trip and we were only delayed by "Good Weather" at one or two anchorages. A super start for the Admiral's career which lasted for another nine years.

Changes had taken place over the 12 years of the May cruise: more people had a large enough vessel to comfortably make the long trips – some over 500 miles; fuel was more readily available



TOP hat and fish tails with Sir Geoffrey Johnstone and fellow May Cruisers, including Frank Mills in the top hat.

in the Islands, even restaurants for an evening out of the galley, and GPS and other communications. This led to larger fleets and the need for more discipline and forethought. Not a problem for our Admiral so ably assisted by his chief navigator, Mac Robertson.

Exploration and new discoveries were always part of the plan as was fishing (spear and rod) and conching. We always had great respect for the aims of the Bahamas National Trust and its goal to conserve our treasures above and below the sea. The expeditions varied each year and covered The Bahamas from

Walkers Cay, Abaco, to Ragged Island and Acklins. Plans were always subject to weather (good and foul) and changes were made by consensus, but the Admiral always had the deciding vote.

Two weeks at sea has its inherent challenges and part of the Admiral's role is to anticipate and sort out the challenges. And part was to keep us from possible boredom with various cocktail hours, joint meals on the beach and musical concerts most often provided on the bow of Skylarkin with Frank Mills at his omnipresent keyboard, directing a sing-a-long. Picture the scene at Water Cay,

Ragged Island with all the boats gathered together for a performance by one of the world's greatest! And maybe a full moon. No rock concert could surpass that evening.

So this has been a little token of appreciation for all that Geoff did for all of us who had the pleasure and joy of being part of his May Cruise fleet. We brought in friends and family to join in this incomparable experience, and they came from all over the world. We thank you once again for your generous and noble life, and most of all for your great gift of LOVE.