

Latitude 38

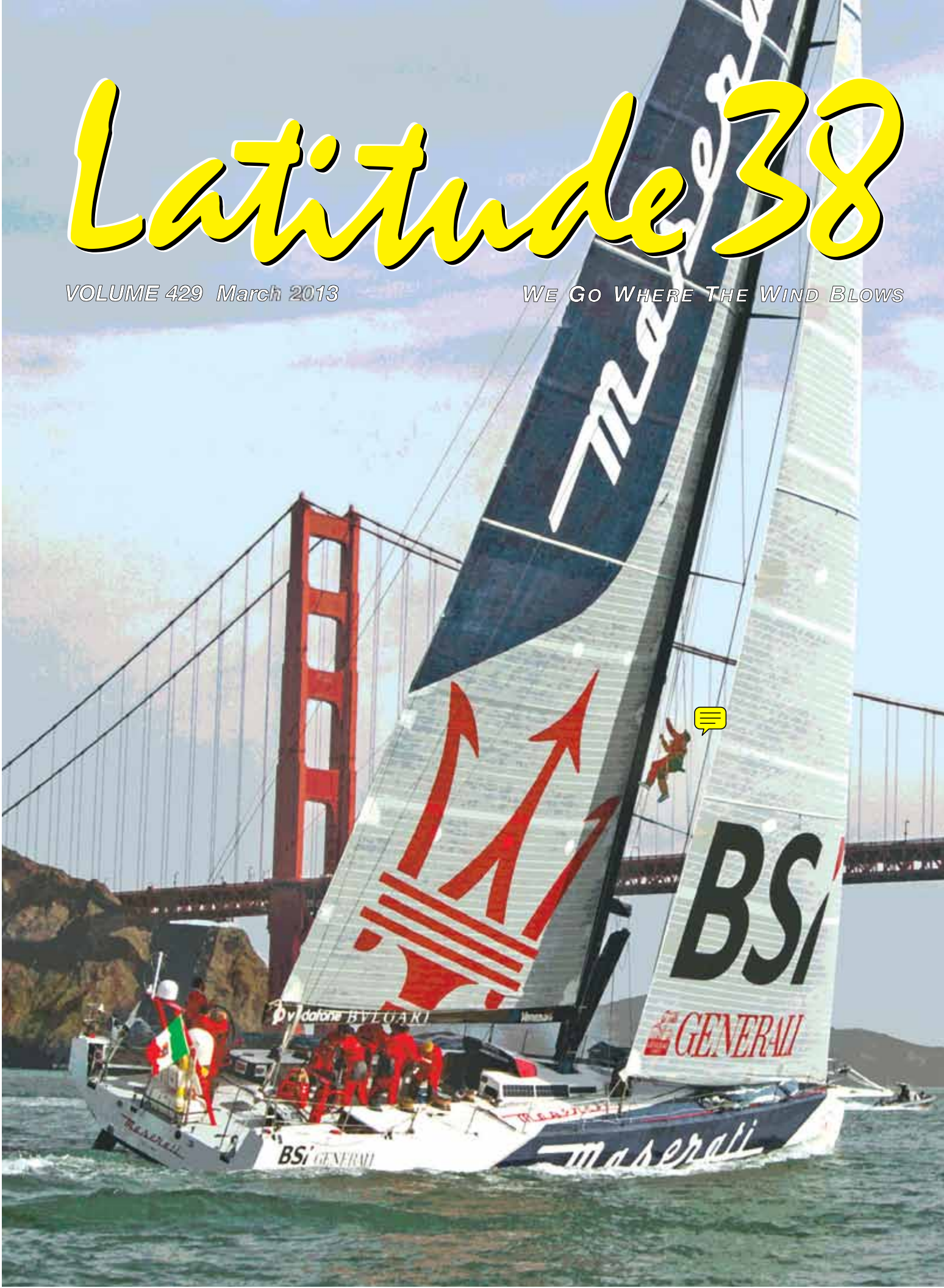
# Latitude 38

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WE GO WHERE THE WIND BLOWS

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# RESURRECTING THE GOLDEN RULE —

In boatyards all over the world, sailboat fanatics of all stripes expend countless hours of labor and shocking amounts of money to resurrect neglected vintage vessels. But none have a pedigree quite like the *Golden Rule*.

"The *Rule* has stirred the imaginations

Angelman-Davies gaff ketch bound for the U.S. nuclear test zone at Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Islands. Their widely publicized intention was to non-violently disrupt, and draw attention to, the nuclear bomb tests that were being conducted in that U.S. territory.

"At that time," explains Oliver, a member of Veterans for Peace, "both the U.S. and the Soviet Union were conducting above-ground tests of very large nuclear weapons, which produced readily detectable clouds of radioactive fallout that wafted around the planet. Radiation contamination began to turn up in cows' and mothers' milk. Public concern grew and, for the first time, many middle-class Americans began to

idea for the *Golden Rule's* voyage was spawned.

The other crewmen were William Huntington, George Willoughby, Orion Sherwood and James Peck — all of whom were deeply committed to non-violence.

*Golden Rule* and her crew never made it to the Marshalls, though. Instead, they were arrested and jailed in Hawaii twice while en route. But reports of their mission did make an impact on the public mindset, and it inspired others to follow their lead.

"Far from being defeated," says Oliver, "their example helped to ignite a storm of worldwide public outrage against nuclear weapons that resulted in the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, and which has continued down to the present in the many organizations still working to abolish weapons of mass destruction.

"The example set by the *Golden Rule* and her crew was also the inspiration for all the modern environmental and peace voyages, and craft that followed in her wake."

The first of those was the 50-ft Colin Archer-style ketch *Phoenix of Hiroshima*, whose owners met Bigelow and his crew in Honolulu, and were inspired to carry on their mission. They sailed to the Marshalls that same year and successfully entered the test zone in protest. The horror of nuclear war was an issue close to the heart of the *Phoenix's* skipper, Dr. Earle L. Reynolds, as he had been sent to Hiroshima after WWII to study the effects of nuclear fallout on the growth and development of surviving Japanese children.

There is also a direct connection between *Golden Rule* and Greenpeace, explains Oliver. "At a Vancouver meeting of activists in the late 1960s Marie Bohlen, an American inspired by the *Golden Rule's* exploits, suggested a pro-



Above: The 'Golden Rule' sails off Diamond Head in 1958. Right: Busted by the U.S. Coast Guard in Honolulu.

of people ranging far across space and time — from Hiroshima to Connecticut, and from the 1950s up to the present," says history professor Dr. Skip Oliver. Why? Because she holds a unique place in maritime history, having been the first modern vessel used to spotlight and protest the escalation of nuclear warfare.

In 1958 a crew of anti-nuclear weapons activists, headed by former U.S. Naval Commander Albert Bigelow, set out from San Pedro aboard this 30-ft

*Fredy Champagne surveys 'Golden Rule's* storm-battered hull. It was obvious the renovation would be an enormous challenge.



SHERRY CHAMPAGNE



U.S. COAST GUARD

wonder if their government knew what it was doing."

Although Bigelow had commanded both a subchaser and a destroyer escort during WWII, news of the bombing of Hiroshima led him to an epiphany: "It was then that I realized for the first time that morally, war is impossible," he wrote. Later, after he and his wife became Quakers, they housed two Hiroshima Maidens who'd come to the U.S. to undergo plastic surgery for disfigurements caused by the bomb. That experience galvanized his anti-war convictions.

In 1957 the Bigelows joined The Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), and tried to effect change via a petition drive and requests for an audience with White House officials. But when those efforts proved fruitless, Bigelow and others turned to more visible means of nonviolent protest, and the



# THE ANTI-NUKE FLAGSHIP



NATE LOMBA / OPPORTUNOGGRAPHY

**Breaktime. L to R are: Luke Lucariello, Leroy Zerlang, Chuck DeWitt, Alicia Parreira, Cody Hills, Daleen Zerlang & Brittney Anderson.**

test voyage toward the U.S. nuclear test site in the Aleutians. The rusty trawler *Phyllis Cormack* soon headed north, and Greenpeace was launched.

"Just as importantly, the use of non-violent direct action as a basic guiding principle by the *Golden Rule's* crew would also influence future generations of activists. The seas of the world have never been quite the same since.

*"Their example helped to ignite a storm of world-wide public outrage against nuclear weapons."*

"It is in the memory of her crew, and the causes that they helped to inspire," Oliver adds, "that the Veterans for Peace have vowed that the *Golden Rule* shall again ride the waves of peace."

Before bringing you up to date on the resurrection of this unique historic craft, we should mention that Hunting-

ton later helped found Peace Brigades International, and both Bigelow and Peck were later among the original thirteen Freedom Riders who, in 1961, risked their lives to desegregate interstate public transportation in the American South. Professor Oliver explains, "Peck was savagely beaten by a Ku Klux Klan mob, and Bigelow placed his own body between a mob and (future Georgia Congressman) John Lewis." The politician recounted that story at the 2012 Democratic National Convention.

Little if anything is known about what happened to the *Golden Rule* during the past half century after she was sold in Hawaii in 1958. But somehow she ended up derelict in a sleepy Humboldt Bay anchorage, where she sank during a storm in 2010. Afterward, she was raised from the

depths by local tug operator and master mariner Leroy Zerlang of Zerlang & Zerlang Boat Yard.

"Leroy has had a lifelong love affair with Humboldt Bay, its history and its classic wooden boats," explains Oliver. He has a gruff exterior, beneath which lies an equally gruff interior. He is not much of a peacenik, but he's coming around.

Given Leroy's penchant for old boats, he couldn't resist the challenge of raising the *Golden Rule*, with the idea of finding some folks to restore her to useful purpose. "After doing some research on the boat's background," explains Oliver, "he was startled to learn that the *Golden Rule* had played an important role in the history of the Cold War. He put out some feelers and was contacted by the Smithsonian Institution, several historians, and finally the Veterans for Peace.

"One day in 2011, longtime Veterans for Peace activists (and nonsailors) Fredy and Sherry Champagne wandered into the boatyard, having heard something vague about a peace boat in need of restoration. Fredy swears that when he put his hand on her keel, the boat spoke to him, asking for another life."

The couple soon struck a deal with Leroy: He would provide space and facilities, if the Veterans for Peace would rebuild her. As you might imagine, the restoration team is "an eclectic mix of sailors, shipwrights, historic boat lovers and peaceniks."

Steps of the restoration are being overseen by master shipwright David

**Restoration Coordinator Chuck DeWitt poses beside the prettiest portion of the 'Rule's refit: her shiny new transom.**



NATE LOMBA / OPPORTUNOGGRAPHY

# RESURRECTING THE GOLDEN RULE

Peterson, who is said to be the most talented wooden boat restorer on Humboldt Bay. Restoration Coordinator Chuck DeWitt is another key player. A Navy vet and environmentalist, he makes sure that the necessary tools and supplies are always available to the team, plus he's involved in fundraising and publicity. Welding and metal fabricating are handled by Dennis Thompson, a vet who lives aboard his self-built, 44-ft steel sloop *Andromeda*.

Peterson and DeWitt advise a wide range of other volunteers, including some who were barely out of diapers when the Cold War ended. One is boatwright Brecken Van Veldhuizen, a recent graduate of the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding near Port Townsend, WA. "To her," says Oliver, "the three words that every woman should most want to hear are, 'Let's go sailing!'" Another is former high school all-American linebacker, Mike Gonzalez of Trinidad. A talented wood sculptor and sailor, he is a strong be-



*You need only look at this photo of the 'Rule's trashed interior to know that her resurrection is barely short of a miracle.*

liever in "peace, love and freedom." He says sailing and the *Golden Rule* embody all three.

"As of this writing the restoration is moving ahead briskly," reports Oliver. "Volunteers and shipwrights are on the job daily. The hull is fully planked and nearly faired, and is about ready for

painting. The new Yanmar diesel engine (which was donated by an anonymous supporter) has been installed, the deck beams are in, the cockpit well is done, and the decks are framed. A new prop and shaft are being delivered, and the interior is starting to go in."

The current goal is to launch the newly refurbished hull sometime this year, then send the *Golden Rule* on a "ten-year voyage in opposition to war and militarism," a vision that meshes with the VFP's principal goal: "that the United States abandon war as an instrument of national policy." If only that were as 'easy' as rebuilding an abandoned wooden hulk from stem to stern.

— *latitude/andy*

(For more on this remarkable effort see [www.vfpgoldenruleproject.com](http://www.vfpgoldenruleproject.com), and while you're at it, see if you can dig up a copy of Bigelow's 1959 chronicle *Voyage of the Golden Rule*.)

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