

KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Francis "Flyer" Santos has spent the last eight years building the world's largest indoor scale model of a boat. The boat is the *Rose Dorothea*, an Indian Head Schooner: 125 feet long, 25-foot beam, built in 1905 at the Tarr⁹⁸ James Yard in Essex, Massachusetts. Why the *Rose Dorothea* is important to Provincetown and to Flyer Santos is because in 1907 it won the Lipton Cup out of Provincetown in a dramatic mast-splitting fishermen's race. The captain was Marion Perry. Flyer now owns what was Marion Perry's home. As I am writing this in the Heritage Museum, Marion Perry's granddaughter has arrived with Elmer Silva. She is donating the binoculars used during the race. Bronze colored, heavy, and metal, they were made by LeMaire in Paris. The right lens is a bit dirty but they work, not like Zeiss but they are pre-World War I.

Flyer's labor and expertise is all volunteered. His helpers have given freely of their time. Their interest is not only in the *Rose Dorothea*, but in the privilege of working with Flyer Santos, a master boat builder of constant good company. The Historical Association as well as private donations finances the project. The Sail Club, a limited group paying the hefty sum of to rig the boat, has completed its donation. This is not the first model of the *Rose Dorothea* built by Flyer Santos. When Flyer was twenty-one years old, fifty-two years ago in 1935, he built a float for the Knights of Columbus to use in the Fourth of July parade. That model was for a one-day parade, one day, and was first prize material then. But, the model of the *Rose Dorothea* at the Heritage Museum is permanent and will outlast us all.

Flyer could talk on about the *Rose Dorothea* for as long as ears could listen. But, I wanted to know more about and enjoy the life of Flyer, Provincetown born and bred.

Flyer was born in the basement apartment of my house at 58 Bradford Street, September 10, 1914. He was the second of seven children born to Madeleine and Joseph Peter Santos. Madeleine is still living, is ninety-four, has a memory for all her past, and reads without glasses. Madelaine was also the name of the first child who lives in New Bed-

ford. Francis, really "Flyer," was second, the first son. Then came "Josie"- "Joe Windows" as we all know him, followed by Elizabeth, Priscilla (who lives in Detroit), Jimmy and Carol. All are living, six still in Provincetown.

Flyer enjoyed his youth and "liked school very much until freshman year," the first year of the Depression. Despite hardship, Flyer continued and graduated in 1932. He knew that the practical knowledge of work was more important to him and his family than Burke's "Conciliation of America" speech, but he managed to maintain both roles. His ongoing study of history and boat building combine the intellectual and the physical. Flyer is a dreamer and a realist at the same time. He realizes his dreams.

The struggle of the Depression put Flyer into several jobs. Each evening he sold needed items door to door. One item of this era was "Depression Taps" for shoes. They were rubber, cost 39 cents, and just like a patch on a tire, you could repair your ailing foot gear. Flyer created jobs, he sold fish, not now and then, but every day. "That's how you build a business, every day." Fish sold. He would go to the wharf and perform as a barker for Wong's Chinese Restaurant. Barking done, he would go off to Patrick's and work at the saltwater taffy trade. The next stop was the boatyard where all the young lads of Provincetown would "work." "Mostly we scrapped among ourselves as to which one would row the people out to their boats. No motors then, all muscle power." The shift following was the paper route, the largest in Provincetown; not much money, but the most varied samplings of delicious pies. Flyer's favorite was a Guinness' Restaurant next to the Red Inn where Jimmy Crawley's grandmother arrayed ten different flavors daily. Nice to know that grandson Jimmy keeps up the proud tradition of expert cooking. It was during this era that Sweeney Marshall dubbed Flyer with his nickname, "Flying Machine." "I never did stay at one thing too long, always in motion, so Sweeney said, 'you're like a flying machine.'" Flyer's next endeavor after high school was to open a restaurant, "Flyer's Square Deal," where Sal's Restaurant is now. He was sixteen years old and ran it for nine years, a completely solo endeavor. The war came and ended that, and Flyer was off to Rhode Island for his war effort work.

From those rich years in his boyhood Provincetown, Flyer has two outstanding memories of adults who effected and shaped his life. His paternal grandmother, Emilia Santos, was a remarkable woman for many reasons. "She was a big woman, could carry a barrel of flour and a barrel of sugar up the steps, no help. She would lift her brothers. She had a swamp garden where Taffy and Lil Silva live now. She had two new houses built by Rogers who was one of the best and the most fancy carpenter in town. You can see his earmarks all

over your house, diamond shingles, those gutters, the way he cut them. He built your house, 58 Bradford, and Ruth O'Donnell's house, 5 Atlantic Avenue. She paid for it all, cash from taking in washing and ironing. He built Commercial, see that porch with 'GASPA' scribed into it? Rogers—went to California. People here weren't ready for that fancy work. She had twenty-seven rooms in your house, and she was a tyrant if you didn't keep the place clean, you were out. She had the face of a Prussian general. What a disciplinarian! The most remarkable thing was that she was blind thirty years or more and deaf. All that work she could do and was blind. She owned all that land, sold down Winthrop Street to Fake Cheda to build a house next to and behind Taffy's to Sebula to build. You used to sell to neighbors in those days. When I was thirteen years old, I went to take care of her for three weeks. She had 'pingtings' tiny chicks behind the stove keeping warm until old enough to go into the yard. She used to fold her bills in a certain way so she knew exactly how much she was giving you to run an errand. She taught me to pray and to count in Portuguese in three weeks. Remarkable woman."

The other influence on Flyer was Furtado the boat builder. His boat shop was where Sal's is now. When Flyer was finished selling door to door at night, he would go to Furtado's. He would stop to listen to the old timers talk of whaling and fishing. This is where Flyer was introduced to boat building. Furtado was from San Miguel, Azores. He couldn't read or write, but was a genius at his craft. Everybody was drawn to him. Norman Rockwell at his nervous 5'8", 110 pounds, was attracted to the boat yard in order to find a subject for his illustrations of *Moby Dick*. He found his subject in Garippa Silva, one of the original crew members of the *Rose Dorothea*. The studio was set up on West Vine and Tremont where Wendy Willard lives now, 27 Tremont. Flyer got the mast and rigging and set it up for Garippa to pose. Billy Miller's widow had a telescope, old and brass. Flyer secured it for Rockwell to use as a prop for the sketches.

Flyer is always helping somebody. That "Flying Machine" energy had him knowing such details as to who would have an antique telescope. These peaceful days were left. Flyer was off to Bristol, Rhode Island, for five years, 1940-45, to work at the world famous Hereschoff boatyard building PT boats, mine sweepers, and air, sea, and rescue boats. Hereschoff is, of course, famous for his ever-popular, ever-durable ketch. The years also catered to the Vanderbilts and all cup defenders prior to the war.

Flyer had married Irene Maille' in 1938. Irene is French, from New Bedford, and was a skilled hair-dresser. "Nice when you can have a wife who can help you." The couple had six children: 3 boys, 3 girls. "That was done on purpose. I wanted a boy, a girl, a boy, a girl. It's like wood in India and



Flyer Santos, age 25 years

Africa: if you cut it on the full moon, it won't work right. So girls are conceived on the waning of the moon, boys on the waxing. So, we had Jimmy, Janet, Francis John 'Grassy,' Patricia, Dorothea, and Arthur Joe. Patty is in Harwich, Dorothea is in East Greenwich, R.I. The rest live here. It's all been a struggle, but I enjoy working. I taught all those kids to swim by the age of four and to row and sail by six or seven. I married a non-swimmer, but my kids needed to know, being brought up on the water. It was a struggle, Depression and war and big families, but it's like Abe Lincoln, 'all I am and hope to be I owe to my angel, mother, and wife.' My wife did the bookkeeping for the boatyard all those years. To my mother and my wife I owe everything."

Flyer Santos started the West End Racing Club thirty-five years ago. "Most fishermen can't swim, so I thought 'start with the kids, teach'em to sail and swim.' It used to be free. Then someone said charge \$5 for the summer so they'll value it. A boy from Kuwait won the trophy this year. It'll go back to Kuwait. David Oliver of Cape Tip Sports donates the trophies. This year the trophy was a memorial for Richard Meads, club champion for seven years. I didn't sail much this year; put my time into the *Rose Dorothea*. I always worked. I like doing things. When we were kids there was no boredom. We fixed our own bikes, our own boats, swam always, clammed, fished; a bucket of clams in five minutes, a bushel in fifteen, and a barrel in two hours. I miss those other craftsmen though. Dominic Avellar, best carpenter in town, built the high school. He went off to California, I think—bigger demand. Eddy Marcy's a worker. He's a millionaire, worked hard in that oil business. I work every day, the Racing Club, and the *Rose Dorothea*. It's sad the rich are buying the working class out. If they offer you \$200,000 and you say 'NO,' they'll offer \$400,000. It's all the same to them, but you're gone. I won't sell. I'll retain my boatyard. I've got five grandchildren in town. I'm here for good.