

# KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

One of Provincetown's most colorful characters is coming up to his 84th birthday on September 10th, so I thought I would visit early and let you know a bit about Francis "Flyer" Santos. Flyer is a man of many passions, no half measures and blessed with good health, a loving family and a wonderful marriage. Flyer's wife, Irene, is always adding lively information to our chats.

One of Flyer's passions is the *Rose Dorothea*, an Indian Head Schooner 125 feet long, 25 foot beam built in 1905 in Essex Massachusetts. The *Rose Dorothea* is important to Provincetown and to Flyer Santos because in 1907 it won the Lipton Cup out of Provincetown in a dramatic mast-splitting fisherman's race. The Captain was Marion Perry. Flyer now owns what was once Marion Perry's home at 94 Commercial Street. Sir Thomas Lipton had minted and donated a handsome 3 foot stunning trophy which is housed in the Heritage Museum. Marion Perry, against all odds, even a broken mast, won the magnificent trophy for Provincetown at the Boston-Gloucester Race. Take a stroll over to the Heritage Museum to view this trophy and while you are there you will be able to see another magnificent sight—the *Rose Dorothea* built by Francis Flyer Santos over 8 loving years.

Flyer's labor and expertise was all volunteered. His helpers gave freely of their time. Their interest was 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 financed the project. The Sail Club, a limited group of donors, paid the hefty sum to rig the

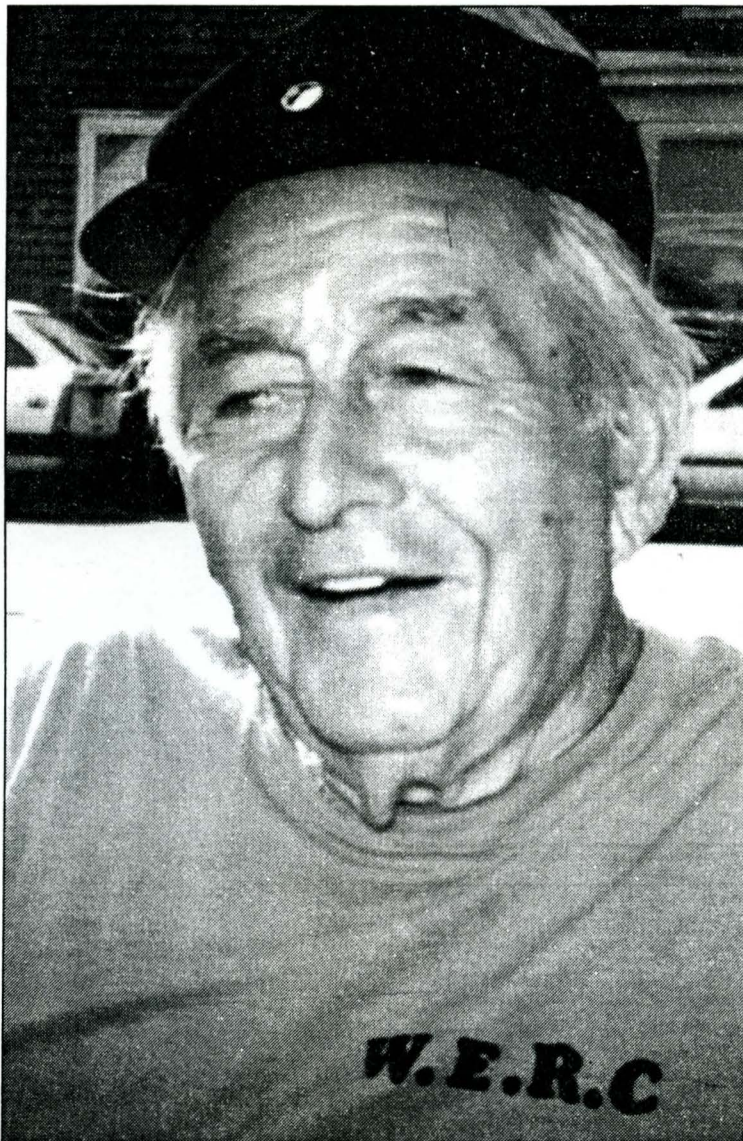
boat. Frank James helped with the labor of rigging the beautiful model. I have been a volunteer at the Heritage Museum since the day it opened, I am the only volunteer left from the original group. I cannot count the times that open-mouthed amazed tourists from all over the world are in awe of the unique model. "The work!" they say, "the dedication!" They get so carried away they wonder how we moved it in here or how we will move it out, until they realize that it was built in place.

People from the world over and in all professions have marvelled at this work.

This was not the first model of the *Rose Dorothea* built by Flyer Santos. When Flyer was 21 years old, 63 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; he even named one of his six children after the vessel. But I wanted to know more about the life of Flyer, Provincetown born and bred.

Flyer was born on Conant Street in a great metal bed of green and blue and red on September 10, 1914. He was the 2nd of seven children born to Madeleine and Joseph Peter Santos. Madeleine was first born and she lives in New Bedford. Josie or "Joe Windows" came after 'Flyer' and is the only deceased sibling. Elizabeth is in New Bedford, Priscilla in Michigan, Jimmy and Carol are both in Provincetown.



Flyer enjoyed his youth and "liked school very much until Freshman Year", the 1st year of the Depression. Despite hardship, Flyer continued and graduated in 1932. He knew that 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 everyday. "That's how you build a business, everyday." 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 salt water 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 next shift was the paper route, the largest in Provincetown; not much money, but the most varied samplings of delicious pies. Flyer's favorite was 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 Sheeney Marshall dubbed Flyer with his nickname, "Flying Machine." "I never did stay at one thing too long, always in motion, so Sheeney 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 16 years old and ran it for 9 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 Provincetown boyhood, 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 & Lil Silva live now. She had two new houses built by Rogers who was one of the best and fanciest carpenters in town. You can see his earmarks all over your house, diamond shingles, those gutters, the way he cut them—58 Bradford and Ruth O'Donnell's house at 5 Atlantic Avenue. She paid for it all, cash, from taking in washing and ironing. He built on Commercial, too. See that porch with "Gaspas" scribed into it? Rogers went to California. People weren't ready for that fancy work here. My Grandmother rented rooms in your house—she was a tyrant. If you didn't keep your 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 30 years or more and deaf. All that work she could do and she 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 13 years old, I went to take care of her for 3 weeks. She had "pingtings", tiny chicks behind the stove keeping warm until old enough to go into the yard. She used to fold bills in a certain way so she knew exactly how much she was giving you to run an errand. She taught me to count and pray in Portuguese in 3 weeks—remarkable woman!"

Flyer's other influence was Furtado, the boat builder. His 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 Streets where Wendy Willard lives now at 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 provided him with the knowledge of details such as who would have an antique telescope. These peaceful days were left. Flyer was off to Bristol, R.I. for 5 years, 1940-45, to work at the world famous Hereschoff Boatyard building P.T. boats, mine sweepers and air, sea and rescue boats. Hereschoff is, of course, famous for his ever-popular, ever-durable ketch. For years, prior to the war, the boatyard catered to the Vanderbilts and all Cup defenders.

Flyer married Irene Maille in 1938. Irene is French, from New Bedford and is a skilled hairdresser. "Nice when you can have a wife who can help you." The couple had 6 children, 3 boys and 3 girls. "That was done on purpose. I wanted a boy, a girl, a boy, a girl. It's like wood in India and 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. It's all been a struggle, but I enjoy working. I taught all those kids to swim by the age of 4, and to row & sail by 6 or 7. 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.

"It's sad the rich are buying the working class out. If they offer you \$200,000.00 and you say 'no', they'll offer you \$400,000.00. It's all the same to them, but you're gone. I won't sell. I'll retain my boatyard. I'm here for good."

I went to Flyer to discuss the West End Racing Club—well, as you can read and imagine, that's another story. Happy 84th Birthday, Flyer.