

SIGHTINGS

a bright star

They say it's a business venture, but they seem more like kids excited about a new toy than two shipwrights restoring a 51 year old cutter.

Since they're doing the work on speculation and there's no customer involved yet, "we're doing it the way we want to," says Jeff Rutherford. "We're doing everything first class."

In April Jeff and Antony Leighton bought what was left of *Bright Star* at Bethel Island and trucked her to Richmond. The 53 ft cutter, built in 1935, had been neglected for at least 15 years. Three years ago she sank, then was pulled out and left in a yard until Jeff and his British born partner came along.

"She was owned by some eccentric guy who tied her up next to his house and then covered her with old tarps, apparently to hide her from the IRS or something," Jeff said. The owner died and they bought her from his estate.

Jeff and Antony have high hopes for *Bright Star*. "We'll be racing her in the next Master Mariner's Regatta," Jeff says with "do or die" determination. "She'll be the most beautiful boat on the Bay."

But standing on her crumbling deck and looking down at Richmond dirt through the gaps in her hull, it's obvious they have a long way to go. To give you some idea of how much time it takes to rebuild an old wood boat, Jeff says it took almost all day to remove just one of the keel bolts.

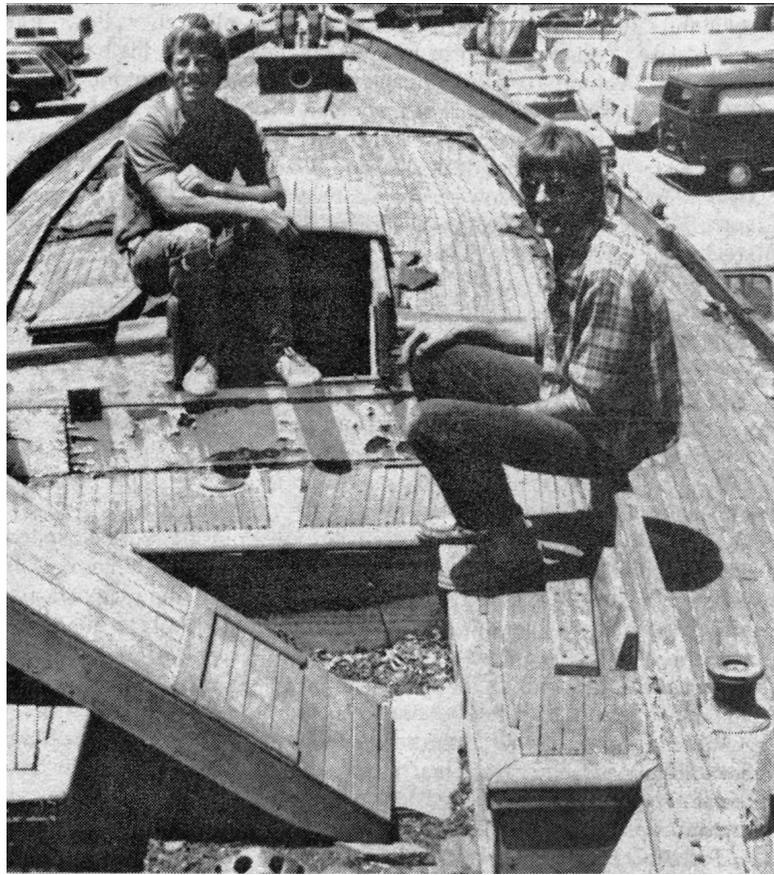
They've replaced 53 ribs. It takes about four hours to remove the old square galvanized nails, pry out the broken or rotted rib and replace it with four half inch oak strips laminated with epoxy. The strips are hammered in from the deck, screwed in place and trimmed off when the epoxy hardens. Jeff says the laminated frames are stronger than traditional steam bent ones, and a lot less trouble.

Most of the old frames were solid from about 18 inches above the keel, but water sitting in the bilge had caused a sort of electrolysis between the metal fastenings and the oak, and the wood turned black as if it had burned.

"For the most part the frames were cherry," Jeff says. He figures he will have to replace about a third of the planking. The new planks, all fine grain first growth fir from Oregon, are drying next to the boat in his boat repair shop along Cutting Boulevard. It took a full day to plane them down to an inch and half, "in sawdust up to here," says Jeff, holding his hand about fanny high. "We had 70 to 80 garbage bags of sawdust," Antony says.

The deck house will be rebuilt of mahogany. The old deck will be torn up and replaced by two layers of plywood covered by fir planking. "Fir's not as durable as teak, but the old deck is fir and it lasted 50 years," Jeff says.

Bright Star's 75 foot hollow spruce mast weathered



TIM STAPLETON

Jeff, left, and Antony aboard 'Bright Star'.

the years of neglect in good shape. It's propped up on sawhorses, waiting for a coat of paint and maybe another 50 years on deck.

Bright Star is cutter rigged. She's 53 feet on deck and was about 60 feet overall, including bowsprit and a boomkin that Jeff plans to eliminate. She should be stiff to sail, since the iron keel weighs 14,000 pounds, about 37 percent of the the boat's 40,000 pound displacement.

She's an Edson Shock design, built in Southern California and apparently raced there in the 40s and 50s. Myron Spaulding measured her for the YRA in 1947 and she may have raced a little in San Francisco Bay. Jeff doesn't know much more about her past, and if you know more, he would be interested in hearing from you.

Jeff says *Bright Star* will be a classic wood boat outside, but below decks she'll be a modern yacht with electronics, a propane stove (it came with a two burner alcohol model) and a spacious main cabin. In the style of boats of its day, *Bright Star's* interior was "cut up into a bunch of little dungeons," Antony says.

They'll invest \$60,000 to \$80,000 restoring *Bright Star* ("we're going to be full time paupers for a while") but one thing they won't have to buy is sails. "It came with eight brand new cotton sails," Jeff says. "They're 15 years old but there's no mildew anywhere. They're prettier than dacron, but they're hell to maintain."

Before they're finished, Jeff and Antony will have examined every piece of wood on the boat, and they'll have replaced a good portion of it. "We wouldn't want to do this to a boat we didn't like. We're having fun," Jeff says.

Bright Star is sort of a test to see if Jeff and Antony can make any money by buying neglected wood classics and restoring them. "I think we can do it and come out on top," Jeff says. "We'll sail her for a while and sell her — if we don't fall in love with her."

— jr