

# Personal Insights from the Old Pueblo Group

Sharing our world with you.

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## Vessels of Memories

### Behind the Helm – Geoffrey J. Miller.

I have an affinity for all things nautical. If it floats on the water, has a bow and stern, then I am interested. There is something truly wonderful to be said for the slender curves and blended angles that only nautical craft seem to exhibit. I personally am more attracted to that of the powered version (things with motors, typically large and fast). But I also very much appreciate the romance and grace of such wonderful wind powered vessels such as the '94 Stars and Stripes Americas Cup boat. Or the USS Bonhomme Richard, a 1700's merchant that was converted into a warship and subsequently Captained by the father of the modern Navy, John Paul Jones. They all are incredible examples of elegant engineering with purpose.

To clarify further, it's not just small boats that I love, its ships as well. And yes, there is a difference between a ship and a boat (one can carry the other). I am one of the lucky ones that have been privileged to navigate many over my lifespan. From small little paint punts, knockabouts, RHIB's and J44 Sailboats. To Tahiti jetboats, Mastercraft Wake boats, pontoons, various houseboats as well as large 450' Fast Frigates and 825' Amphibious Assault Ships. Between my personal and Naval experience, I've driven vessels through 2 oceans, 3 Seas, the Panama Canal (3x), countless lakes, bays, rivers and reservoirs and I can truly say that all of them were memorable and enjoyable. Picking one is like being asked to choose which of my sons is my favorite, impossible! However, in the spirit of this article, I have managed to narrow it down to two of my top picks – A Cobalt 220S, currently my personal boat and the USS HURRICANE (PC-3), a Cyclone Class US Navy Coastal Patrol ship (unfortunately not available as a personal option). And the truth is, the similarities between these two are striking.

Starting with the Hurricane. I first saw this class of ship while a Second Class Midshipmen (Junior) at Annapolis. It was moored at the end of Farragut Field during Commissioning week and was available for tours. The Cyclone class ships were purpose built to carry US Navy SEAL Platoons near shore. They worked in pairs delivering forces at night and were designed to be fast and nimble which made them truly unique ships of the Navy. After talking with the Captain, and the Weapons Officer, I learned they were highly competitive billets for advanced Officers, and therefore crews usually consisted of only capable and focused sailors. Say no more, I wanted in!

At graduation I received my Commission and entered the Surface Warfare Officers program with orders to the USS RENTZ (FFG-46) in San Diego, CA. I spent those two years learning about systems, leadership, warfare, ship handling and all things Navy. We chased drug runners all over the Eastern Pacific, sank some ships along the way, and received a few awards in the process. I must have done something right for I earned myself a stellar recommendation from the Captain and Executive Officer and subsequently received orders to report to the USS HURRICANE (PC-3) out of Coronado Island, CA. I was ecstatic for the Navy only operated six of these ships and therefore billets were incredibly competitive. Dream come true!

The Hurricane is unique in that the Officer of the Deck (OOD) physically drives the ship. Almost all Naval ships have a Conning officer operating under the OOD who gives orders to a Helmsman (steering) and or Lee Helmsman (throttle). However, due to its need for maneuverability and operations close to shore, with limited

manning, these positions are removed and the OOD handles the controls directly. She has four screws (propellers), each powered by 4 diesel engines, which pushes the 179' ship to speeds of 35+kts (40+mph). It was one of the closest things to a small powerboat that the Navy had, and I absolutely loved it! I learned so much about navigating that ship around tight spaces as we would patrol through the San Juan Islands off of Canada. Or how quickly we could converge on a target while guarding oil platforms in the Northern Arabian Gulf. They were beautiful ships, had the ponies to go, ability to lay down some firepower, and were simply a blast to drive. Our ship in particular received the Battle 'E' award while I was onboard as we had some of the most competent and capable sailors and officers in the Navy. It was truly a privilege to lead them and work alongside those men. My love for being on the water, and the memories it created were forever etched in my heart from this ship. I keep a picture of her hanging in my office as many of you may have seen.

Fast forward about 5 years later to 2009 to when I working as a relatively new advisor. I originally got into boat ownership through less-than-ideal conditions when my brother unexpectedly passed away. He owned a 1991 Bayliner Capri 2050 which I received as a result of his passing. It was an entry level power boat but was in pristine condition and ran like a dream. I knew it well for when my brother was alive, we would always make a trek up to the lake to spend a day or two on the water together whenever I was home on leave. By taking it over, I was thrust into immediate ownership and all the trials and tribulations it entails. I can proudly say that my experience was nothing but positive as this little boat allowed me to learn the ins and outs of boat ownership. She was forgiving of errors, had good manners, went fast and reliably cruised me and my family around various lakes countless times never once leaving us stranded or disappointed. However, as our family grew, its limitations started to surface as it was just a bit too small, a bit too underpowered, and I couldn't help but feel my attention being pulled elsewhere.

This leads me to the Cobalt. Full disclosure: I am in no way pining or advertising for Cobalt. I just happen to be a fan, and in my opinion, they make a fantastic boat. I still remember flying from San Diego to Iraq in 2004 and, knowing I was about to enter a Combat Zone, I felt compelled to write down a list of my goals in life. I guess my thinking was that if something happened to me, somebody would find this list and know that I had purpose and direction in my life and could deduce what truly mattered to me. The #1 goal was being a dedicated husband and active father for my kids. But further down that list somewhere between wanting to coach a youth sports and becoming a pilot, I simply wrote 'Own a Cobalt'. When the opportunity to get one revealed itself at an attainable value, I took the opening to make it mine. Luckily, the little Bayliner sold quickly at a good price which helped offset the cost and didn't hurt the Miller household financials. And frankly, our family loves being on the water, so I was more than willing to take on the expense knowing the many memories that would soon be made onboard. And yes, I did shed a few tears watching the Bayliner get towed off into the sunset. She was a wonderful boat, but her time had come, and I needed something that was truly mine. I think my brother understood what I was after and wouldn't take offense to the decision. Thanks Brian, I miss you.



*Preston and Bryce enjoying some tube time*

The Cobalt 220S boat is a 22' Runabout, which means it has an open bow for riders, can pull skiers, tubes, and wakeboarders, has a swim deck and comfortably sits 12 passengers. The lifting hull design allows it plane quickly and thanks to its fully composite construction, is incredibly solid and handles with the lightest touch. There is plenty of power in the Big V-8, and thanks to the fuel injection, sips gas at cruise. Its balance handles with the greatest level of ease around the dock. And it's even in my favorite color - a deep Royal-Navy blue that still makes me smile and fills me with a sense of pride every time I pull the cover off.

Regardless of all the amazing physical attributes this vessel has, its most valuable asset is what it has given me personally - Memories. You see, to me it's not just a boat. Rather it's a vessel that provides a way for my family to connect. I think of the fun we have together on the water and the endless smiles it brings my boys. The sheer joy we've experienced swimming off the deck, towing the kids and their friends in tubes, picnicking while floating under the warm June sun. This has been the boat that my oldest son, Preston, has taken an interest in being involved. Every time I'm doing something on it, he's right next to me, learning, asking questions, helping. He is of that age where things that go fast are starting to get his attention, and this allows us yet another way to connect as father and son. I still smile thinking of him first sitting on my lap nervously holding the helm, to where he is today, fully in command of the boat. My youngest, Bryce, well he's usually found sitting in the bow letting the air blow through his hair next to the dog or swimming off the back of the boat like a little otter. And along the way I taught my wife, Meghan, how to launch and recover to the point that onlookers are truly impressed with the ease of our launching/recovery operation. I man up the truck and back the boat into the water while she warms it up and effortlessly takes it out to sea...err, lake! It's all amazing and wonderful, and it truly brings our family together. I consider it a common bond amongst us, and those memories will forever be part of our life.

As it clearly looks on paper, these two vessels are no doubt different by every means imaginable. One, a ship of war, sleek and powerful. Haze grey with guns, armor, radar and more. The other, a boat, small, nimble and sturdy. Both took much work to attain, and even more work to sustain. However, in my mind, they share the exact same DNA. They represent positive experiences, hopes and dreams. They make me think of the great times I had as a young Officer and all the emotions I felt from the sense of adventure and happiness that ensued. Or the latter with my young boys first time in the tube or seeing the dog jump into the water to cool off or napping under the sun next to my wife. They both were created with purpose and quality by the designers. Hand built with pride and care to be cherished by the Captains who guided them and the crews and families they carry.

Boats aren't a hole in the water where you throw money. To me, they are vessels meant to hold many amazing and wonderful memories to be forever cherished and remembered.

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