

BEST BOSS ON THE BAY —

Well over three decades ago, a wide-eyed 25-year-old "country boy" from the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake stuck out his thumb in front of Tiburon's Boardwalk Market in hopes of catching a ride up the peninsula. To his delight, a kindly gentleman in a fine

fun and hanging out with his friends and the crew." Hart's idea of a good time was going sailing on the Bay or elsewhere all afternoon, then taking his guests out to dinner at a fine restaurant. Rick agreed

to tell us the *Hasty Heart* story as a tribute to his long-time "best friend" and employer, who passed away three years ago.

a broad smile. "After his parents sold the Mark Hopkins in '61, he figured he needed a new hobby. He took up tennis, but he wasn't very good at it. One day he got hit hard right in the balls with a tennis ball, and after that he decided he needed a new sport!"

"He was just a regular guy having fun and hanging out with his friends and the crew."

Although Rick was thrilled to land a job working for such a generous and fun-loving fellow, getting accustomed to Hart's lifestyle was definitely an adjustment. But the boatwork came naturally. Despite the fact that he had never been sailing

Hart first bought a Folkboat, aboard which he learned the basics, then eventually moved up to a Coaster 30 that he and a couple of friends once sailed to Southern California. The Pearson was his first big boat, and as his sailing ex-



LATITUDE / ANDY

Now that Rick (center) is officially retired, daughter Emily runs the back office for 'Hasty Heart' and son Ricky serves as first mate.

car stopped to pick him up. When the young man, Rick Pearce, explained to the driver that he'd just finished detailing a wealthy client's sports car, the gent said, "Well then, I ought to get you to clean my sailboat."

That was the beginning of a wonderful 32-year friendship and working relationship between Rick and his exceptional boss, the late San Francisco bon vivant Hart Smith. Rick's job as captain of a succession of three yachts, all named *Hasty Heart*, was one of the sweetest gigs we've ever heard of within the West Coast sailing industry.

Hart was a colorful San Francisco character who grew up in the luxurious surroundings of the Mark Hopkins Hotel on Nob Hill, which his parents owned along with several other prestigious properties. He was a tireless patron of the arts who loved the symphony, ballet and opera; a world-class raconteur whose stories amused a wide range of friends; and a true gourmet who ate both lunch and dinner out literally *every day* of the year.

"But he was not at all a snob," insists Rick. "Especially when he was on the boat, he was just a regular guy having

before meeting Hart in 1975, you might say Rick already had saltwater in his veins. "Some of my earliest memories are of fishing with my grandfather — a true Chesapeake waterman — on the Eastern Shore of Maryland," he explains.

Rick started out just crewing, cleaning, and doing other boat chores aboard the first *Hasty Heart*, a sweet-sailing Pearson 43. But when the boat went to Southern California for a couple of months each summer under Captain Tom Martin, Rick got to stay aboard keeping her shipshape. "Hart would fly down every weekend with a different group of friends and we'd sail out to Catalina, along the coast, or down to San Diego."

As much as Hart loved those trips — and many later cruises in Mexico and Hawaii — he never tired of sailing around the Bay. In fact, when his boats weren't voyaging elsewhere, he'd typically take different groups of friends out on the Bay both Saturday and Sunday of every summer weekend.

The flamboyant socialite hadn't grown up sailing, however. "Hart used to tell a funny story about how he got into it," confides Rick with



THE STORY OF *HASTY HEART*

perience grew, so did his enthusiasm for far-flung adventures (although, being a true gentleman, he never helped deliver the boats back against the wind).

By 1983, Rick had earned a Coast Guard-issued captain's license and the gig got even better, as he moved up from first mate to captain. In '87 Hart upgraded to a beautiful Wauquiez Centurion 47, which made two summer trips to Hawaii and seven winter cruises to Mexico with Rick in charge.

Over the years, Rick fathered five children and Hart not only became a grandpa figure to them — including coming to their house to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas — but he always insisted that Rick's wife Bridget and the kids fly out to Mexico or Hawaii and

Spread: Blasting upwind past Yellow Bluff, 'Hasty Heart' shows her classic form. Inset: Her master suite is fit for aristocracy.

enjoy the boat for a few weeks when he wasn't entertaining friends. That tradition became particularly sweet after Hart bought the last *Hasty Heart*, an exquisite Swan 61, in 1996.

As Rick explains, viewing the famous Swan 59 *Perseverance* one day at the St. Francis YC "lit a fire" within Hart, and a couple of weeks later he'd scheduled an ambitious 'shopping trip'. The two men first flew to Florida, where they checked out boats in Ft. Lauderdale and Miami, then hopped down to a couple of Caribbean islands, and across to Italy, Spain and France. He finally found this Finnish-built beauty in Cannes and quickly bought her.

Back home, Rick told Bridget, "I've got to go back there and take delivery, then he wants to cruise around

over there for a while." She took the news in stride. In fact, it turned into a great opportunity for the whole family. After Rick flew off to assume his new duties, Bridget took a leave of absence from work, put the family house on the market, took the kids out of school, and flew with them to Palma, Mallorca, where they joined the boat.

They spent the better part of a year touring in the Med, Aegean and Caribbean while the boat slowly made her way to the Bay. Whenever Hart and his entourage would arrive for a cruise, the family simply found accommodations ashore.

Over the years Rick has logged close to 100,000 sea miles aboard this boat alone, as he's taken her to Hawaii four times and Mexico 10 times. In addition to flying Bridget and the kids out to enjoy the sailing life in those venues, Hart also rewarded many of his Bay Area crewmen by flying them south of the border or out to the islands for a 'working' vacation.

Hart never tired of those far-away trips. He absolutely loved the warmth of those sunny latitudes, "but he never just wanted to lie around," explains Rick. "He always wanted to get out and sail."

"Those extended boat trips were like camping out for him," he adds. "It's funny: He would take cold saltwater showers, even though we have a 24-gallon-per-hour water-maker! But, of course, none of us did."

During the last year before Hart died (at the age of 89), he wasn't really up to sailing on the Bay. So Rick went into the City every morning, fed his old buddy breakfast and took him to lunch.

Before Hart passed in 2008, he gave Rick the ultimate thank you for his years of service, by arrang-



RICH DOLE

Although he was frail and weak, Hart insisted on taking a short stint at the helm during his final trip to Mexico at age 88.



PATRICIA DUNN / PATRICIA DUNN PHOTOGRAPHY.COM

BEST BOSS ON THE BAY

ing to leave *Hasty Heart* to him, free and clear. And he gave instructions to both his banker and the managers of KKMI that Rick was not to take possession until she was in "perfect condition."

"I'm just a simple country guy," says Rick, "always was. Sometimes I can't believe how it worked out. But it's taken me a long time to get into the groove of being the owner, and not having Hart around. He was just such a great guy. . . In fact, I still get a little choked up talking about him."

For his first two years of ownership, Rick barely used the boat, but he finally got serious about running her as a charter boat on the Bay about a year ago. His youngest daughter Emily is running the 'back office' functions, while his son Ricky — who used to stay up until the wee hours with Hart, listening to his



'Hasty Heart' glides past Point Bonita under an enormous masthead spinnaker. Stiff and stable, she makes an excellent charter yacht.

stories — serves as first mate for a pool of three professional captains.

"I told them I won't run the business, so they've allowed me to retire," says the proud father. "I never was very good with money. But then, I never really needed to

be. Believe it or not, I never had a budget working for Hart."

Maintained in bristol condition, *Hasty Heart* is certainly one of the most elegant and comfortable charter yachts on the Bay — and probably also on the West Coast. So we anticipate she'll do well in the charter trade. (Her site is www.sailhastyheart.com.)

"When I met Hart I was not only hitchhiking, but sort of wandering," Rick recalls. "As I said, he became my best friend and a much-loved part of our family."

"After he passed I stood on the foredeck of *Hasty Heart* at San Francisco YC (the homeport for all of Hart's boats) staring down the street to the traffic light where he first picked me up. It was an incredible ride!"

— **latitude/andy**

Latitude 38's Mexico-Only Crew List Party & Baja Ha-Ha Reunion

Make friends and
cruise to Mexico

\$7 at the
door

ENCINAL YACHT CLUB • Alameda
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7 • 6-9 PM
www.latitude38.com/crewlist/Crew.html