

## **A Mermaids Life Story**

The life and sailing adventures of J. Linton Rigg

By Arthur Ross

Tyrrel Bay on the island of Carriacou is where the story began for me. The following events are what have most inspired me to write this and tell the yarn of the life of J. Linton Rigg as I have cobbled it together from his own words and those who knew him. Linton, as he was called, was born in Jamaica WI in 1896. He started the National Family Island Regatta in the Bahamas in the 1950's. He was raised on the east coast of the USA, learned to sail on the Delaware River the Chesapeake Bay and prospered in yacht brokering in NYC after completing an engineering program at Drexel Institute, as it was called at the time. He sailed and played hard in the Gatsby age, along the way writing cruising guides to the Bahamas and another to the Antilles.

The country of Grenada's an unlikely target for hurricanes; at least it had been up until 2004 when Ivan struck a direct hit. The tiny island state of Carriacou, north of Grenada was mostly spared, that time at least. Unlucky the following July as Emily, the fifth named storm of the terrible and memorable 2005 season, hit as a category 5 causing heavy damage.

I arrived the next day, by ferry from the main island of Grenada to witness a third world country that on its best days just manages to get by in this 21st century economy and world affairs. It is a poor but happy and content population of fisherman now very much in a desperate condition. The damage was severe; on this 13 square mile tropical paradise was extensive evidence of Emily's visit.

My purpose there was to crew with an old friend who had unexpectedly lost her husband the previous year to rum and too little exercise, a cruisers curse more than the that of a any hurricane. I picked my way along the road in Harvey Vale where a local van dropped me off. Navigating over telephone poles and their wires that had allowed them to be a part of the communication network that was now tangled into the seashores mess left by the storm.

Debbie from 'Illusions', and Island Packet 29, picked me up in the dingy and we managed to get on board her boat in the rocking sea as the tiny cruiser lurched up and down, head to tail like a bucking horse, the results of the hurricane's fury lasting a bit longer.

The next morning we listened to the VHF radio net as a call for assistance came from the mangroves. Just north of the harbor these wonderful trees grasp the sand in a way that holds them in place and builds a shelter that had saved so many of the boats and their crew from the storm's killer ways. It was a request from the skipper of 'Mermaid', she had no motor, could not retrieve her anchor, steer and haul up the canvas alone.

Debbie relied on friends to help her during the storm, and she was anxious to return the favor, especially having me aboard as another hand, so off we went. As we approached the vessel I realized that this wasn't just any boat, but a locally built large

wooden and different yacht, much different than I was used to getting involved with. We came astern, and the skipper yelled that one of us had to steer as he raised the anchor and the dink pulled him out.

I jumped up on the transom to see the deck, on old and beautiful boat along with an anxious and irritated owner.

‘Take the wheel’ he said, and ‘where did you come from, who are you, and do you like American politics’ all in one breath as I became familiar with the helm. He was making me dizzy with so many out of context and constant questions. We got underway, the little inflatable pulling the gigantic boat; only in the lee of the mangroves would this be possible.

As we came around the bend, we passed by a creek, the creek that once inspired a young boy years ago to dream of a remarkable vision. I had no idea of this dream or boy as I steered my way clear of the entrance and was told by the owner to ‘get off now.’

The boat’s owner is John Smith, an icon owning the iconic boat. A livaboard with nothing traditional about himself, he owned “Mermaid” and his gruff persona and was certainly a different kind of character. On the dinghy we made our way back through the anchorage to our boat, and that was that, just another moment in the strange days that were to follow.

So it went, not sure of the course, but I knew that this was not the usual few weeks in the islands that I have come to love during my winter visits. Being from Pennsylvania, it was just beginning to get weird, as Hunter Thompson would say.

I would later find out about the other icon of Carriacou, Canute Calliste, and how he and Linton are linked by the ‘mermaid’, as a child the vision Canute had at that creek we passed by at the opening to the mangroves.

Linton arrived here in the ‘60’s at the peak of both of their lives; Canute was now a famous painter, musician and boat builder. Rigg was a sailor extraordinaire, and in need of a home, a boat and a purpose. They found each other and here the end of the story begins.

The 40th anniversary of the Carriacou Regatta, started by J.Linton Rigg, was this week in a few weeks. Because of his competitive love of sailing he developed this gala event just as he started the Bahamas regatta years before. Part of the festivities today, apart from the sailing races was a special dinner party at what was Linton’s home on the northeastern part of the island in the boatbuilding town of Windward, facing the islands of Petite Martinique, and Petite St. Vincent. It was a beautiful view from a hilltop, no wonder he chose this spot to finish his journey of life. He named it Tranquillity. The current owner, a wonderful and charitable lady, Eutha McLaren, the famous boat builder’s daughter, and that same builder who built ‘Mermaid’, was our hostess. Along with the crowd of locals and a few of us yachties was the Prime Minister of Grenada and his security detail, all here to celebrate.

I was having fun, local music playing as we drank rum and ate barracuda stew. The home was inviting, and I strolled into the living area, there I met Eutha. She offered me a tour and I gladly accepted. We went from room to room, ending up in Linton's bedroom, just as he had left it 40 years ago. Log books and world band radio caught my eye, I was enthralled. As we got back to the living room there was a guest book that she asked me to sign, I wrote "Captain Art Ross, New Hope PA", thanked her for such an extraordinary tour into this man's life and home, and went back outside to tell my friends excitedly of my experience.

Moments later I was approached by a lady, who was not local by her looks, speaking English from the states. She asked if I was Capt. Art, and when I said that I was, she said she was Betty Anne Rigg, from Doylestown PA and the next town west of my home. She was the honored guest of the evening and regatta along with her husband John Rigg. He is Linton's nephew and Bunny Rigg's son, Linton's younger brother. I was astonished, and we spent the rest of the evening playing one degree of separation and promising to stay in touch.

We met back in PA a few weeks later for a casual diner, I gave them pictures that I took of the island event, and they gave me an unpublished rough autobiography of early parts of John Linton Rigg' life.

I felt I was steering by stars in motion. I had sailed on his boat, if only for a few hundred yards at the helm, met his family, and become instant friends with his "Mermaids" builders' family, saw the creek the vision of the 'mermaid' appeared from, all this in a span of 48 hours.



*Mermaid underway*