

Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Distinguished Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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The Young Pirates Return Home**



From left, Lew Foote who owned the Tira, James Henninger, Lyle Tara and Bill Grace.

The whereabouts of the three young pirates, Bill Grace, Bud Tara and James Henninger, as well as the borrowed boat, the ketch *Tira*, soon hit the media. The boys continued to explore Puerto Vallarta, spent a night in the courtyard of the local jail sleeping on tobacco leaves, and were invited out onto a large American tuna clipper that had anchored nearby.

The *Tira*'s owner, Lew Foote, soon arrived in Puerto Vallarta. The first meeting was a bit tense. Prior to making the trip to recover the lost boat, the owner expressed his feelings about the entire escapade "*I would not have them on the boat with me.*"

Upon first meeting the young boys, Foote asked them why they had taken his yacht? They replied that they wanted to explore the South Seas, and his boat was the only one of the few boats around Santa Cruz that was large and seaworthy enough to make the voyage.

But after a few days working together on the boat, getting it ready to return to Santa Cruz, Lew became friendly with the three boys. They toured around Puerto Vallarta and had a good time together. Lew enjoyed the village so much that he returned in his boat several times in later years, at least once with a Santa Cruz businessman, Rocky Franich.

They got the diesel engine tuned up, filled up with fuel and fresh water and then the young pirates agreed to help Lew Foote take the sailboat back to Santa Cruz. Turns out that they never used the sails on the trip home but powered the entire way. They didn't have a radio or sextant and on the entire trip relied on compass bearings along the shore, and using the taffrail log for speed and distance calculations.

They crossed the entrance to the Gulf of California, tied up in Magdalena Bay where they had stopped a month earlier and then set a course north for Ensenada in order to get clearance to re-enter the US. They reached Ensenada on July 11 and this turned out to be their first encounter with news reporters, which intensified a few days later when they pulled into San Pedro.

The *Tira* was soon surrounded by boats with photographers and reporters and it was in San Pedro where Lew Foote's wife joined the boat for the trip back to Santa

Cruz. On Sunday, July 17th, 1938, at about 4 pm, after 4000 miles and nearly two months at sea, the *Tira* anchored just off the Pleasure Pier. Lew rowed the boys over to the wharf where it seemed to them at the time that half the population of Santa Cruz had turned out to see them return.

They were placed in a waiting police car, and taken to the police station where the officer on duty was Paul Tara, Bud Tara's brother, who booked them into the city jail. Their adventure became the subject of countless newspaper articles and a newsreel that was shown in movie theatres all over the country for some time thereafter.

Despite their pirating the boat, their friendship with the Footes had grown in their time on the *Tira* together. Lew stoutly maintained that all three boys were his guests on the boat until they reached the wharf. Mrs. Foote was quoted as saying "*It's simply impossible to be with them without liking them*".

There were some consequences, however. They washed cars during the day but then were locked in a jail cell at night until their court appearance. On July 26 they appeared in the old Cooper County Courthouse where the presiding judge sentenced them to reform school until they were 21, but then suspended the sentence and placed them on probation.

The boys were required to go to church every Sunday, learn the Ten Commandments, and refrain from drinking and smoking. It was also made clear that they weren't to contribute to any news stories or pose for any news photos. They also had to complete high school and report regularly to their probation officer.

Bill Grace, who wrote the account, surfed for many years and was the first surfboard builder in Santa Cruz. He retired from the Santa Cruz Fire Department after thirty years and also built many homes in the area, including the family home where he and his wife Barbara raised 3 daughters and a son. Bill passed away in 2011 at 89.

Bud (Lyle) Tara served in the merchant marines in WW II and then skippered tugboats in San Francisco Bay. He eventually returned to Santa Cruz where he met and married June, the love of his life. He finally found the perfect job, skippering charter fishing boats for the Stagnaro family. His uncanny ability to find fish made him one of their most popular captains. Bud and June moved to Bend Oregon years ago, and then to Portland, to be closer to their daughter and family. Bud Tara died in 2010.

James Henniger's subsequent life has been hard to track down, but from a few accounts in the old Sentinel, its clear that it wasn't as smooth sailing as the voyage of the *Tira*.