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MY LIFE IN BOATS

EARL McMILLEN III

▼ **FILM CREDIT**
McMillen at Newport
Film, Rhode Island's
year-round, non-profit
documentary film festival

▼ **CLASSIC
TIMES**

The McMillens
on board 104ft
Mathis Trumpy
Freedom, built
in 1926



Grace Trofa hears how a fateful trip to Maine set this Southerner on a path to become a restorer



Mathis Trumpys – 85ft *Enticer*; and 104ft *Freedom*, the queen of the fleet. I own another dozen yachts, including those early boats of my father's, which need restoration – interesting pedigree boats, such as *Sirius*, the last Trumpy built before they closed the yard, and the commuter yacht *Bambino* built in 1936 for L Gordon Hamersley. My son, Nelson, is restoring a boat from the 1930s and I am working with him on the project. He is in college now but well into the boat and having a good time. He is learning how the business works and I am enjoying watching him figure it out.

My wife Elizabeth and I just did a run with the 1928 *Coastal Queen* from St Simons Island to Norfolk; the Chesapeake is beautiful but New England is hard to beat.

Memorable experiences? Oh my lord, I feel like we have them every year. We've cruised with James Taylor, Jimmy Buffett and the Kennedy clan. This summer's highlight was a surprise visit with Reynolds du Pont in honor of his 75th birthday at his home on Fishers Island in Long Island Sound. We acquired and restored the boat his father had built in 1947 and docked her in her original slip. The conversation at the Fishers Club that night was about *Goddess* coming home. I was fortunate to turn a passion into a business; it has been great for 25 years. ▣

I am a Southerner, born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. Growing up, I spent many a summer on Sea Island in coastal Georgia. When I was young my dad had a 68ft Densmore wooden yacht from 1927 called *Mahogany Lady*, but I really didn't get into boating until I was in my early 20s.

After my little brother died tragically in a car accident, my dad looked for a father/son endeavor that would allow us to spend time together outside of work. For two years we restored *Nifty III*, a 39ft, 1939 Elco Cruisette. I worked for my father's real estate development business during the week in Atlanta and on weekends brought the construction crew to work on the boat with the local shipwrights.

By then I was 24 years old. I took that summer off, rallied some friends as crew and we took the boat from St Simons Island up to Newport, intending to make our way up to Maine. But in Newport, I met all these wonderful kindred spirits that were restoring classic wooden yachts and I felt I'd found my new home. We didn't go any further. I began restoring classic boats and chartering while trying



to come up with a sustainable business that would allow me to rescue, restore and preserve classic yachts. We syndicated our first partnership with loyal friends in *Zapala* (now *Grace*) a 1913, 60ft motor yacht, built by the New York Yacht, Launch & Engine Company. We kind of pioneered the idea of fractional ownership in the mid 1990s.

I have part-ownership of at least a half-dozen boats that are up and running: *Miss Asia*, a 1923, 62ft Consolidated commuter; *Goddess*, a 1947, 60ft Consolidated; two