

# A Sailor's Story By Claude Milot

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Loopers began arriving at Albemarle Plantation's marina early this year, thanks to the growing knowledge that there was much to see and do in the towns promoted by the Albemarle Loop. But the Loop's director Jack Atwell had no idea that looper #14 on May 5<sup>th</sup> was someone special.

As the 43-foot ketch *Harmony* tied up at the marina dock for water, fuel, and a pump-out, Atwell thought he recognized its captain, a mustachioed 70-year old as spry as a teenager. It was Frank Arbusto, an old friend and shipmate that he had lost touch with years ago. And that's a long sailor's story.

Jack and Frank share a similar background, both having been born and raised in Westchester, New York, and both being drawn to the sea. After high school, Frank went to Fort Schyler Maritime College in Throgs Neck, NY, and graduated in 1970 as an ensign with a 3<sup>rd</sup> mate's license. He quickly joined the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a decision that would lead to a long and challenging career at sea.

Frank's first assignment took him to Seattle, one of 12 officers on the *Fairweather*, a 222-foot hydrographic-survey vessel used by NOAA to produce nautical charts in support of navigation and commerce. In February, the *Fairweather* would head north up the Inner Passage to Alaska where Frank spent 250 days in each of the next two years mapping the ocean.

From 1973 to 1976, Frank served two tours aboard the *Miller Freeman*, NOAA's largest trawler doing open-ocean investigations of fisheries and water quality. On the first tour, Frank was XO (executive office) to Jack Atwell, the ship's captain.

On Frank's second tour he served as the *Miller Freeman's* captain, but not before he learned to dock the ship in close quarters. As Frank tells the story, Jack was captain when the ship docked in Seattle one day, and Jack wanted some shore leave to visit his wife who was pregnant. But a certain Admiral Townsend, a sticker for details, told Jack that neither he nor his crew would get off the ship until Frank learned how to dock it. It was 5:30 in the morning when Frank made his first attempt. He didn't get it right until 8:30 after five tries and lots of grumbles from the crew.

Frank tells another story about being out at in the Bering Sea with scientists doing a fish survey, when he got a forecast of a storm bearing down on them. The scientists didn't want to leave, because



Figure 1 - Miller Freeman in Dutch Harbor Alaska



Figure 2 - Frank Arbusto

the seas were still calm. But Frank ordered the ship to seek shelter, which was ten hours away. The ship made it, but some crab boats didn't. "If you've ever watched 'The Deadliest Catch,' you know what I'm talking about," he said. "Ice would build up on the boat's superstructure, and all that weight would make the boat tip over and capsize."

And Frank was aboard ship in Seattle when Mt. St. Helens blew in 1980, giving the scientists on board a unique opportunity to conduct a months-long project to study the effects of the volcano's plume on Puget Sound and the coastline all the way down to San Francisco.

Following his West Coast adventures, Frank took NOAA assignments in various East Coast venues like Woods Hole, Massachusetts, Norfolk, and Miami, as well as a year at Fort McNair National Defense University. After too many adventures to list here, he retired in 1993 with the rank of Commander.

Not a man to take it easy, Frank started and ran maintenance and construction companies, managed multiple rental properties, towed barges from New York to Maine, and, with his wife Sarah, raised five children. He and Sarah purchased *Harmony* in 2003 so that they could continue to do what they love best: sail.

Home base for *Harmony* and the *Arbustos* is Huntington, Maryland. But since discovering the Albemarle Sound, they have used Albemarle Plantation's marina these last two months as their home base from which to do the Loop. And talk over old times with Jack Atwell.



Figure 3 - Harmony

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Additional Notes:

**Local knowledge for approach to Albemarle Plantation Marina can be found at <http://albemarleloop.com/videos.html> : and "[Albemarle Plantation Entrance Video - view the actual navigational courses and markers for entering the channel to Albemarle Plantation Marina](#)"**