

## Sailing with a Classical Guitar

by Claude Milot

When Albemarle Plantation Marina's dockmaster J.E. Darnell told me Hans, a looper, was tied up at the marina and might have a story for me about surviving a hurricane on Ocracoke Island, I hustled down to C dock, looking for Hans's sailboat, the S.V. Warrel II. Before I even found it, I heard it—the unmistakable sound of classical guitar.

Hans van Meeteren welcomed me aboard and introduced me to his wife Greta who had been producing that ethereal sound. And thus began an hour of the most pleasant conversation with two absolutely delightful sailors. But they had not survived a hurricane on Ocracoke, although they did have an interesting tale to tell. Actually, more than one.

Hans began by telling me that he and Greta were both Dutch, but that he was also an American citizen, having been born in the United States almost by accident. His father had been in a Dutch Air Force squadron stationed in Indonesia when the Japanese invaded in 1942. Most of the Dutch citizens living in Indonesia were rounded up and put in concentration camps, but Hans's parents escaped with his squadron to Australia. The squadron later transferred to the States and joined the American Air Force in Jackson, Mississippi, and soon flew to New Guinea to resume fighting the Japanese. Meanwhile, Hans was born in Jackson in 1944. After the war, Hans's mother and father went back to Australia to care for Dutch citizens recovering from internment in the prison camps. In 1948 they returned to the Netherlands. That was the first story.



Figure 2 Hans

about to give up sailing.



Figure 1 Warrel II

Hans then told me about going to school in the Netherlands where he earned a degree in Electrical Engineering from Delft's University of Technology, one of the best engineering schools in the world. He had become an assistant professor there when he met Greta, who happened to be the secretary of his boss. Hans and Greta were married in 1968 and started a family. Mike was born in 1972 and Koen in 1973. In 1982 Hans went on a teaching sabbatical to Minnesota. And decided to stay. The following year Greta returned to the Netherlands, packed up all her household furnishings and shipped them to Minnesota in a 40-foot crate big enough to hold the couple's wooden sailboat. The van Meeterens had been avid sailors in Holland, and they weren't

Hans worked ten years for Control Data Corporation, a mainframe and supercomputer firm based in Minneapolis. That and his later career as a consultant in the specialized field of power utilities are interesting stories in themselves, but I want to get to the van Meeterens' experience surviving hurricanes.

Hans's consulting business had taken the van Meeterens to the New Bern area of North Carolina, a perfect location for avid sailors. So, in 1998 they built a home, along with a dock on Ball Creek for their new sloop, the Warrell II. Unlike their neighbors, they chose to build the living space of the house above the garage. And that proved to be the wisest decision they could have made. When Hurricane Irene's torrential rains hit North Carolina in 2011, Ball Creek rose five feet above the garage floor, floating everything in it, including their old wooden boat, up against the ceiling. They ended up with four feet of debris in their yard as well, but their poor neighbors, unfortunately, had five feet of water in their living rooms! The new boat survived with minimal damage.

When Hurricane Florence hit this year, the van Meeterens knew enough to move to safety. Many trees were downed, but Bay River and Ball Creek, being so close to Pamlico Sound, did not flood as they had with Irene. And with an undamaged sailboat, they were free to resume their favorite activity, sailing. And classical guitar, which Greta started playing again as I drove away.



*Figure 3 Greta*

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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](#)”**