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#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 The River Rat... Captain Randy Potts!

2 Sunset Cruises and the M.V. Idyllwood...

3 Without Equal...

## The River Rat... Captain Randy Potts!

By Gary McWilliams, *the Festival Nomad*



"Captain Randy Potts"



"The Captain at work"

This "*Special Edition*" of Festival Notes is dedicated to the "*River Rat... Captain Randy Potts*". I first met Captain Randy about 5 years ago. I was impressed then and am even more impressed now. It's not the Randy is a huge dominating figure in stature. No, he quite the opposite. It's the power of his imagination and his ability to work through all sorts of challenges that is so impressive. Captain Potts owns and operates Sunset Cruises of Muskoka. He has two cruise boat, the *M.V. Idyllwood* and the *M.V. Peerless II*. The Idyllwood has been cruising the Muskoka Lakes for a number of years, while the Peerless II is just about to embark on its latest career as a cruise ship. Randy's knowledge of Muskoka and the Muskoka Lakes is second to none. As his biography points out, Randy "*Born and raised in Muskoka, on the water for over 40 years, and a licensed captain for over 20 years.*" Randy combines his knowledge and experience when he takes his customers out on a cruise of the Muskoka Lakes. No two trips are alike! Randy has hundreds of stories of the area and he loves to share them with anyone who wants to listen. However, this story, this "*Special Edition*" is not just about cruising the Muskoka Lake. It's really the story of a man's journey through dedication and perseverance and a result, following and achieving a life long dream! The story began over 20 years ago when Randy first earned his Captain's license. During that time he captained the famous "*Segwun*", but this was for someone else. He wanted his own cruise boat and company, so he purchased an old 40 foot 1920's era private yacht and then began the long process of restoring it. It took Randy many years of personal "*blood, sweat and tears*" to realize his dream, the *M.V. Idyllwood*. For most people this would be the end. For Randy, it was just the beginning! Enter the hulk of an old but historic "*lake oil tanker*", the *Peerless II*. The *Peerless II* is Randy's newest "*dream*" and in few days his dream will be realized. Again after many cold winter days and sleepless nights, the restoration of the *Peerless II* is almost complete!

Please see The River Rat... on page 2

The two articles and photos that are included in this "Special Edition" were written after meeting with Randy at his home and "office" (his dock on the Muskoka River). The first article is about the *M.V. Idyllwood* and was written a few years ago. After that initial meeting, we had pleasure of cruising on the *Idyllwood* during the Rosseau Classis Cruise festival. It was a real treat. The second article was written this year, again after meeting Randy at his "office". Judi and I both enjoyed our meeting with Randy and listening to his new adventures. The articles, of course, are not complete. There is so much to Randy's story now and in the future. However, we wanted to give you a glimpse into the life and endeavours of this remarkable man... "The River Rat"!

## Sunset Cruises and the M.V. Idyllwood

**Note:** *This article was written and posted in July 2009 and was about my visit with Captain Potts the previous spring.*

I would not have believed if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes! One day last spring I drove to Bracebridge to meet **Captain Randy Potts**. Randy owns **Sunset Cruises** and the *M.V. Idyllwood*. The *Idyllwood* is a 40 foot 1920's era yacht that was faithfully restored by Randy. He has the photographs and memories to prove it! It took Potts several years to complete the restoration, but the end result is a boat that any owner would be proud of! The *Idyllwood*, under the capable hands of Captain Randy cruises the Muskoka Lakes. Don't let his youthful looks deceive you, he has been a licensed Captain for over 20 years and has been at the helm of some mighty impressive ships, including the famous *R.M.S. Segwun*.

The *Idyllwood* accommodates 12 guests in refined luxury. When I traveled all the way to Bracebridge, I did want to see the *M.V. Idyllwood*, but, frankly I was more interested in Randy's latest restoration project, the *Peerless II*. For 49 years the *Peerless II* roamed the Muskoka Lakes delivering gasoline and home heating fuel to the cottagers and residents of the lakes. In 1994 the *Peerless II* was taken out of service and sold to become a private vessel. Then in September of 2003, Captain Randy Potts and Sunset Cruises purchased the *Peerless II*.

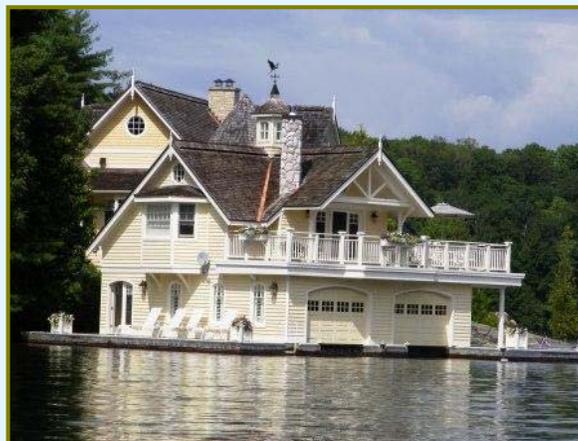
Please see Sunset Cruises and... on page 3



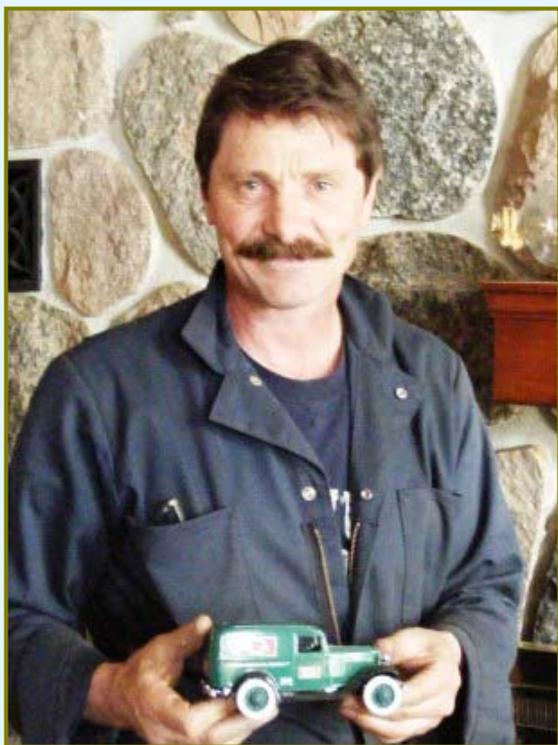
"The M.V. Idyllwood"



"Looking out the back of the Idyllwood"



"View from the Idyllwood on Lake Rosseau"



"Randy Potts...aka The River Rat!"



"My first look at the Peerless II"



You would have thought that Potts' experiences of restoring the *Idyllwood* would have made him think twice about taking on a project of this magnitude, but obviously that was not the case! So here I was, standing on the bare deck of the *Peerless II*, as Randy described what he had already done, what was left to do and what it was going to be like when he was finished. Back on the *Idyllwood*, Randy showed me photographs of the restoration so far. As I said before, I couldn't believe my own eyes! The work that had been done was incredible, and to think Randy was working alone during most of the restoration!

At that point last year, Randy had hoped that the restorations would be far enough along in the fall of 2009 that he would be able to take the restored *Peerless II* on its maiden voyage. However, time and circumstances have delayed the launch date. The fall of 2010 is now the planned launch target. I have already registered my name as a passenger on the maiden cruise. It should be quite the experience! If you like cruising the Muskoka Lakes and want to be part of history, I would suggest you put your name on the waiting list! I am sure space will be limited!

In the meantime, the summer is now upon us and the *M.V. Idyllwood* and its Captain, Randy Potts, are ready to go! So, if you want to see and learn more about Muskoka and the Muskoka Lakes, don't miss a cruise on the *Idyllwood*! Randy knows more stories about the lakes than anyone I know and he is glad to share them with his passengers! Rain or shine, cool or warm, the *Idyllwood* is equipped to handle all climates! Well, perhaps not ice or snow! Find out more about Captain Randy, his boats and the 2009 cruising schedule by visiting the [Sunset Cruises website at http://www.sunsetcruises.ca](http://www.sunsetcruises.ca).

### Without Equal... featuring Randy Potts (aka *The River Rat*) by Judi McWilliams

*"When I say mammoth undertaking, I mean MAMMOTH undertaking! Last year I wrote about the restoration and captain of the M.V. Idyllwood, Randy Potts. He had faithfully restored a 1920's era private yacht that is now offering cruises on the Muskoka Lakes. Well, he's at it again! This time it's a converted oil and gas tanker that was formerly owned by the BA Oil Company."*

Recently Judi and I had the honour and privilege of meeting with Randy Potts (aka "*The River Rat*") at his home along the banks of the Muskoka River.

Please see Without Equal... on page 4

Without Equal... from page 3

We were there to see the progression of Randy's handiwork on the historical vessel "*Peerless II*". It is difficult to tell you all the interesting and exciting information Randy shared with us, but the following are a few facts and interesting stories from Randy himself.

The *Peerless II* is a 60 foot long ship that was built in 1946 at the Northern Shipbuilding yard in Bronte, Ontario for the BA Oil Company. This is the only "*Tanker*" they built. Randy is restoring the *Peerless II* "*not in essence of true exact restoration, but to help people remember the past.*" Randy is 100% custom building the *Peerless II*, mostly by his own hand. However, he is proud that he has been able to employ some others, such as professional welders, who seem to have the "*young eyes*" required for the finer details.

Some interesting facts about the restoration of the *Peerless II*.

- Randy has made alterations to the width of the boat, from its original 12 ½ foot width to its, now, 16 foot width!
- The boat has a 5 foot draft on the bottom at the rear and 4 foot draft at the front.
- There were height restrictions while Randy built the upper deck.
- The *Peerless II* has an original MACK diesel 1945 engine. *Peerless II* has a single engine, single screw. *(At one point in time I had my own 30 foot vessel with a high fly bridge. It a single inboard engine and screw. Needless to say it was a challenge, in the strong winds, to manoeuvre! The boat sometime had a mind of its own, especially in the wind! (even though in calmer weather I could park it in reverse on a dime!)*

Being a very heavy boat, Randy's comment about the manoeuvrability of the *Peerless II* was understated! "*It's a bit of a challenge ... but I like a challenge!*" The restoration of both the *Idyllwood* and the *Peerless II* attests to that. Randy was Captain of the famous "*Segwun*" that also cruises the Muskoka Lakes. He said "*the Segwun is like a sailboat with a mind of its own*". We asked Randy if he will be allowing anyone else to Captain his vessel and he said, "*it takes a certain amount of finesse to drive it, so maybe just himself and perhaps a specific "co-captain"*". (In other words, "*no, Festival Nomad...you can not drive it! Oh well, it was just a thought!*")

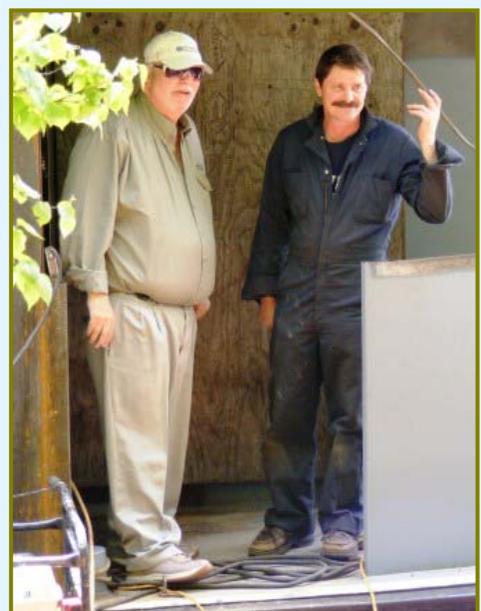
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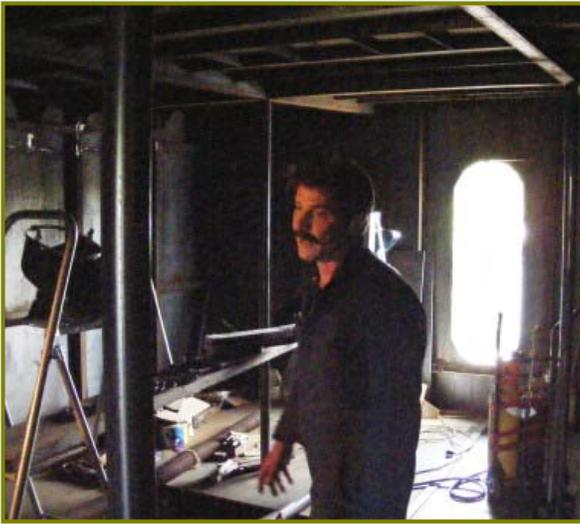
*Peerless II out of water!"*



*"Peerless II's, its new restored look"*



*"Randy explains the renovations to me."*



"Inside the Peerless II."



"Randy's pride and joy, his curved stairway!"

Randy is particularly proud of the outer set of curved stairs leading up to the top deck. He built these stairs by hand (*which is the first set of metal "curved" stairs he has created*). Without the handrail installed at the time, Judi was apprehensive and wobbly ascended the stairs. She was very glad to reach the top and even happier descending the interior stairs which had walls on either side! Apparently the inspector stops by frequently, as there are strict regulations for the heights, widths, curves, etc. that Randy must be adhered to. For example, the handrails are 42" tall, although, as a partial deck they only need to be 36", this being what the regulations require, according to the Ministry of Transportation. There are other regulations, such as 2000 degree fire insulation. Randy has made sure that everything meets or exceeds what is required. He is a perfectionist this way! He is a perfectionist in other ways. The original wheel is being refinished and repaired. This makes for authentic travels while Randy captains. Randy created a shear, long sweeping curved handrail that tappers along the way. The wheelhouse, when I first saw it last year, was on Randy's dock. It has now been installed on the top deck! He has only had to use a crane once for the entire project. This was to put the heavy tanks below decks. Again, Randy is quite proud by the "*manpower*" or "*lack of manpower*" that the project has taken. He had all the steel for the boat brought in to his property. This was a mammoth undertaking! The initial load was 12 tons of steel at \$1,000 per ton. There have been 5 to 6 more tons brought in since! Floating docks were manoeuvred in the water, around the sides of the boat, to do much of the work and welding. Randy referred to these projects as "*old school in a modern way*".

The wheelhouse windows are being restored from photos from the past. There will be 4 windows per side. When talking about BA and their boats, Randy can actually tell the BA boat's history from the logos on the boat. Speaking of photos, Randy would be very excited to get his hands on any old photos or stories of the *Peerless II*, especially from 1946 era. If you have or know of any, please let me or Randy know. These photos and history help Randy stay true to the *Peerless II* reproduction. Randy is also keeping true to the boat's original colours and nature, with plain white paint and some red and green trim. Randy will Captain the boat with an authentic *Peerless II* captains hat and jacket, complete with company logo! All this obtained at a recent auction. Talk about perfection! Again, if you have any photos, or could provide any history to Randy please let me know.

Without Equal... from page 5

A little more about the *Peerless II* history you might be interested in. The *Peerless II* spent approximately 49 years delivering gas and fuel to people's docks and out of the way marinas. These deliveries lasted until the 1990's. Over the years BA's *Peerless II* became a real workboat and serviced thousands of cottagers, businesses and residents.

More about the *Peerless II* and its new voyages ... It will hold up to 45 guests. Don't worry ... the life raft holds 75 people. The raft is compressed and if it even went 35 feet underwater it has a "self-release" mechanism and will pop right back up! There are lifejackets for everyone too. A snack bar downstairs will offer beverages such as wine, beer, water and BA Oil souvenirs, such as hats, t-shirts, mugs and glasses. Eventually there will be an awning covering part of the top deck with chairs and tables for those who like shade or there will be lots of places to sun yourself, along the way. *Peerless II* has a liquor license and will offer beverages to passenger. There's a full lunch and dinner menu in the cabin below. Passengers will be able to enjoy their meal while overlooking the Muskoka waters through the cabins panoramic windows. The dining area seats 24 people. Randy says it is wise for sightseers to book in advance to ensure availability. *Peerless II* will offer cruises for special occasions, such as weddings, birthday parties, final requests, reunions (*\*especially for generations of Muskoka families*), anniversaries, school bookings and more. Captain Potts is hoping to offer "Stargazing Tours" as well. It is best to check out their web site for current and accurate information.

Regardless of the time you decide to spend with the Captain, his crew and the *Peerless II*, Randy assures us that you will be pleased by the "good value and great experience!" Randy is an extremely experienced and capable Captain with fantastic knowledge of Muskoka and the Muskoka Lakes' history. He always provides unique and interesting commentary on each and every voyage. As a result of our experience on the *M.V. Idyllwood* with Randy's commentary, we are very excited and anticipating the imminent "launch" of the *Peerless II*. Congratulations Randy for your extreme dedication and hard work! See you on the water!

NOTE ~ The articles that appear in this **Special Newsletter** have been written over the past few years. They tell the story of the different visits that Judi and I made to Bracebridge and the restoration of the PEERLESS II. We had originally hoped to publish this newsletter last year, but circumstances caused us to delay its publication. Now, restoration story has been completed, and a new story is about to be written... cruising the Muskoka Lakes on the PEERLESS II! Judi and I look forward to our first cruise. Perhaps we will see you there!

If you'd like to learn more about Randy and Sunset Cruises, you can visit their website at [Sunset Cruises](#).



"The upper deck"



"The BA Oil Company Logo"



"Randy's neighbour and helper!"

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