

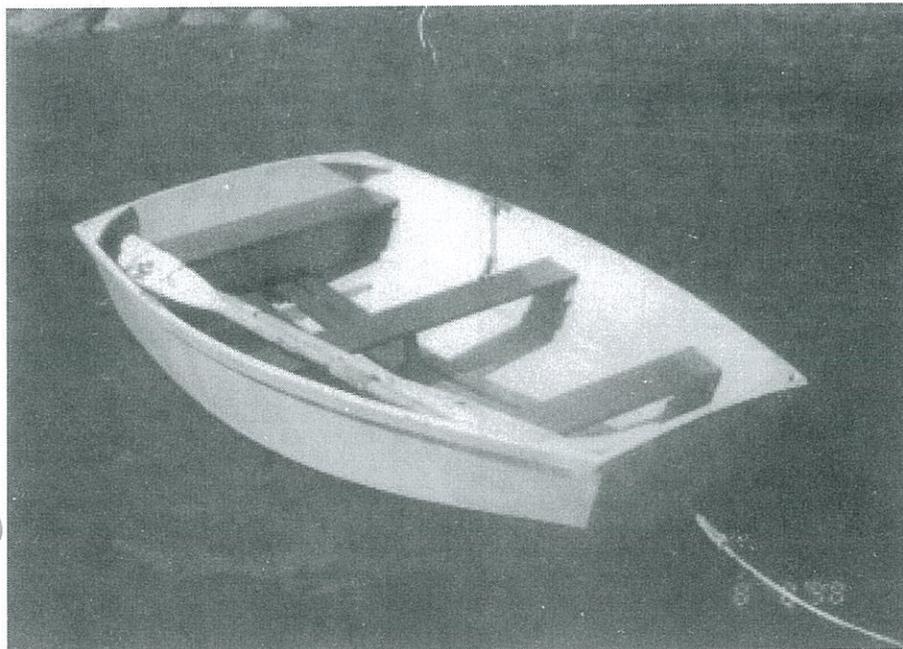
## The Little Gray Boat

By Joe Spalding

In the summer of 1952, I was enthralled with the idea of working at the local Redi-Mix Concrete and at the age of 18 I thought that would be lots of fun. However, after taking a dive while tossing 3/4" yellow pine forms out

of the foundation hole, fortunately that afternoon I heard that a job might be available at Alcott, maker of 12' and 14' sailfish.

The name Alcott came from Alexander Byran and Cortland Hienigar. Red Bryan was



a pal of my older sister and a real neat guy.

Tom Jesinskis (probably spelled wrong) was foreman of the wood shop and Carl (I can't remember) did the finishing. This seemed to be a good opportunity since I enjoyed boats and working with wood. The last time I called Alcott about 10 or 15 years ago, Carl was a vice president and Tom had retired several years earlier.

I signed up for \$1.25/hr. and was off to work by 7am in Waterbury, Connecticut, about 1 hour from my home. I was to work in the shop and my friend who got me the job worked in the finishing room. Our goal was to build a boat of each size and ship them every day.

The sides were 1/4" plywood prefabbed to 1" chines. My major chore varied from day to day, but around Wednesday the centerboard trunks had to be rasped out and smoothed. This was a major event.

I built centerboard trunks, 16 screws each with a Yankee screwdriver. We used double helix bronze screws that were similar to today's deck screws and they really jumped into the wood. The boats were spray-painted and the finish was really tick tock for fir plywood.

The masts were cut to a taper and planed in a planer. Then the corners were cut on the shaper and I finished sanding them to round. I managed to put the taper patterns through the planer at least twice. The spars were long pieces of fir similar to corset rods. Big mast step blocks were made out of Sitka spruce culled out from the mast-making operation.

That summer I also helped a couple of friends to build Sailfish from kits, a real busman's holiday.

This leads up to "the little gray boat". I mentioned that my Dad needed a small rowing boat for our camp in Skaneateles, NY. Carl suggested that I order a Hagerty Sea Shell kit and he and Tom would help me build one on Saturday afternoon (I worked Saturday morning).

Needless to say, I got on the stick and ponyed up my \$25 for the kit complete with oars and locks. These guys had built lots of these dinghies when the Sailfish business was just starting. Alcott also built runner planks and other stuff for iceboats.

The boat flew together in about 3 hours. Tom faired the chine and keel on one side and Carl the other. The boat was finished with Woolsey gray and green floorboards and seats. The floorboards were not part of this kit, but Carl felt it would extend the life of the boat.

The boat was 47 years old this last summer. I have repaired the keel, the bowsom (the other end from a transom), and the gunwale rails. The chine seams have been re-glued with epoxy, but by and large, she just keeps rowing out to our moored boats. She was repainted after each major repair and maybe twice more.

This has made me a believer in fir plywood boats. I have subsequently owned a 1964 Thunderbird, 26' sailboat, built the Samuel Clyde, a 32' light cruiser, and I have built four instant boats so far, a Tortoise and 3 Pointy Skiffs. Needless to say, with a bit of care, a good plywood boat will serve a long time with minimum care and most repairs are easy.

I hope to build skiffs to order when I retire. My aging friends like the flat bottom and the ability to stand near the edge before one creakily eases oneself from the skiff onto a moored boat.