

The Carpenter's

By David Treadwell Photography by Arthur Durity



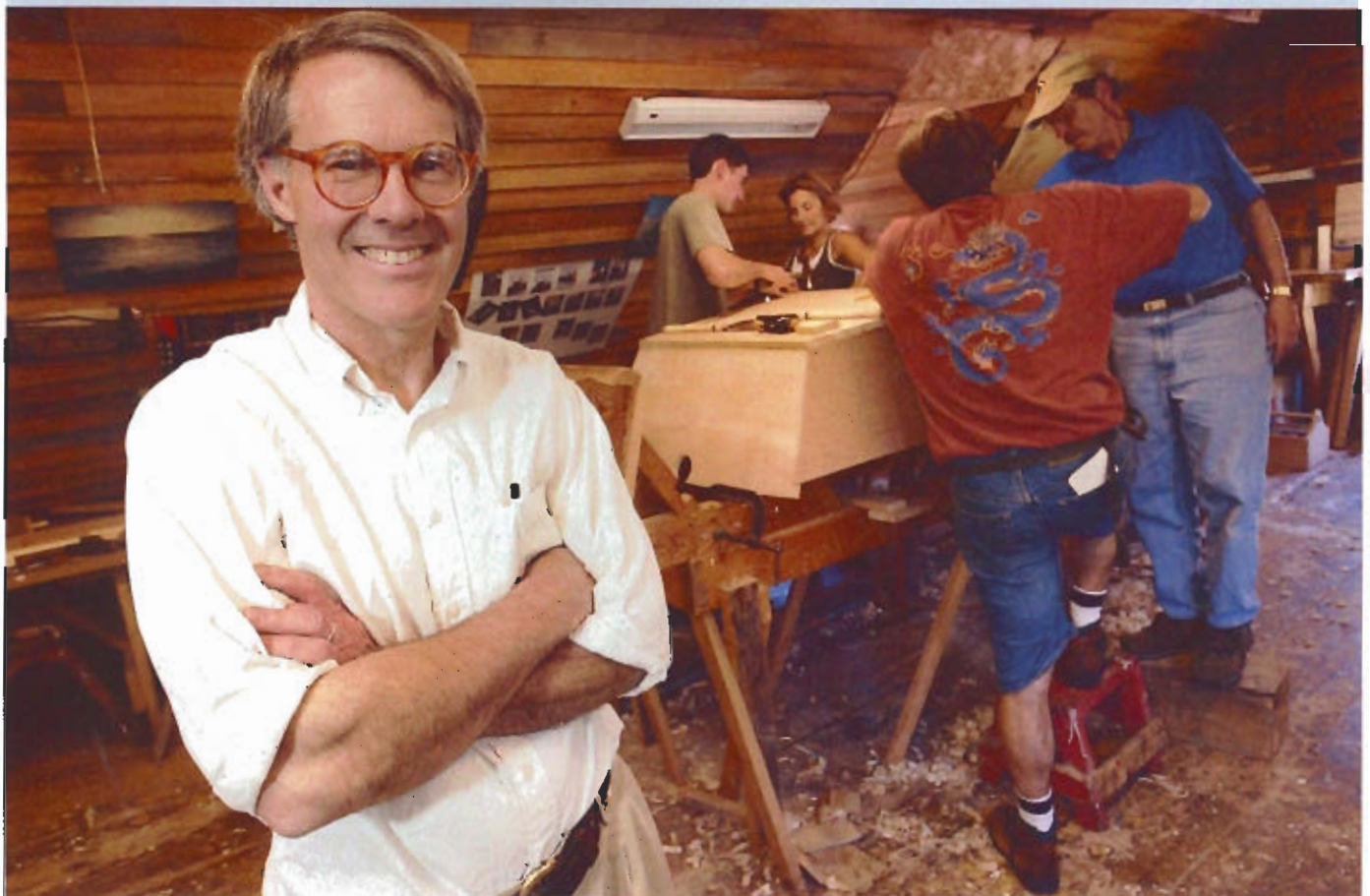
Boatshop

BOBBY IVES '65 AND HIS EXTRAORDINARY MINISTRY OF LABOR AND LOVE





You can see it in the sleek lines and pure sheen of the boats, in the exquisite craftsmanship that converted raw pine or oak or cedar into a vessel that can safely transport a soul from here to there. You can sense it in the gentle way people share tips in the shop or meals at the big table or dreams most anytime. You can hear it in the stories of former apprentices, recalling the transformations they experienced while living and working in a small community on an old farm on a narrow peninsula in Maine. What you can see and sense and hear is the living ministry of Bobby Ives, a life's calling defined by love, guided by simplicity, and shaped by a careful attention to detail in building things and making choices and creating relationships.



SINCE 1979, BOBBY AND RUTH IVES, HIS WIFE and life partner, have been leading the ministry of the Carpenter's Boatshop in Pemaquid, Maine. To fully appreciate the depth and reach of that ministry, one must visit the boatshop and talk to the Ives or listen to the people their ministry has touched. Words on a page can't convey the spirit, compassion and generosity of this extraordinary couple. How do you put a song in a bottle? But here's a try, here's a glimpse.

The Path to Pemaquid

Ministry runs deep in Bobby's family roots. His father was a Congregational minister, and his grandmother was the first woman to be ordained in the state of Maine. Moreover, Bobby was the grateful recipient of a form of ministry while a student at Deerfield Academy. His mother died during his junior year, and his father died during his senior year. "Frank and Helen Boyden were right there for me," he remembers, "They called me in at least once a week to see how I was doing."

After Deerfield, Bobby went on to a successful career at Bowdoin and then completed graduate studies in theology—and met Ruth—at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He and Ruth next spent two years on Monhegan Island, Maine, where they jointly served as the preacher-teachers. Then they lived for a year on Louds Island, where he and Ruth did all kinds of odd jobs and Bobby served a small church in Sheepscot. On Louds he met a life-changing friend: Edward Salor, an old Norwegian boat builder who shared his deep knowledge of the art of building boats. Then came three years serving as minister of the United Methodist Church of the villages of Round Pond and New Harbor.

But Bobby and Ruth harbored a dream, a vision: to create a boat building community where people from all corners of the earth and at all stages of life could come to work with their hands and live a simple gentle life of sharing and compassion. They bought an old chicken farm, cleaned it up and converted the lumber in the coops to sawhorses and workbenches. The local community contributed tools and machinery for the boat builder's trade.

A Magnet from the Outset

"From the beginning our students found us on their own," says Bobby. "People around here knew what we were doing and told their friends. We let our friends in

other towns and states know what we were doing, and the word got around." Today, a quarter of a century later, people still manage to find the Carpenter's Boatshop. Each year eight to ten people of all ages and backgrounds and faiths—or no faith—apply to be apprentices. Many apprentices are undergoing significant periods of transformation: from college to "the real world"; from marriage to a single life; from addiction to sobriety; from one career to another; from work to retirement; even from prison to freedom. Some have woodworking experience; most do not. They share only a desire to be a part of this spiritually-based boat building community for nine months.



The Life of the Apprentice

The teachings of St. Benedict guide the Boatshop's philosophy, as apprentices spend their days in work, prayer, study, service, workshop, re-creation, and hospitality. The Shaker phrases "Hearts to God" and "Hands to Work" adorn the Boatshop's barn doors.

The bulk of the time (at least 40 hours a week) is allocated to learning woodworking skills while building boats, restoring boats or making Shaker furniture. A master chart lists assignments for additional duties, everything from meal preparation or trash-collecting to showing visitors around the Boatshop. Staying busy is never a problem.

In September, after they first arrive, the apprentices are divided into two teams. Each team builds a Monhegan Skiff under the patient guidance of Bobby Ives and two



other instructors. Later, each apprentice builds his/her own skiff. Every boat contains a brass plaque with an inscription, "Custom made by The Carpenter's Boatshop" and an old Scottish prayer:

*Round our skiff be God's aboutness—
Ere she try the depths of sea,
Scashell frail for all her stoutness,
Unless Thou her Helmsman be.*

But Why Boats?

The boat building focus fits Bobby's ministry for practical reasons that extend beyond his love for the craft and the sea. "People's lives depend on what we're doing, on the security of well-made boats," he explains. "So the craftsmanship is critical. The apprentices learn to work carefully on boats, and that care extends to their relationships with people and the choices they make. I see that happen over and over."

And then there's the safe harbor metaphor. "We have tried to offer a small light to help guide a few wayfarers. But like all harbor watchers, our hope is not to keep

the wayfarers at anchor; rather it is to help them gain a sense of courage, confidence, and compassion, so they can soon set sail, to go forth strengthened and encouraged for their next journey in life."

More Than a Boatshop

The hours spent outside the actual workshop are just as important as those spent honing woodworking skills. From 15 to 20 people share breakfast, lunch and dinner—as well as stories and dreams—at a long table. Friends and former apprentices often drop in to share meals with the Ives, the apprentices and instructors. A large map of the world and a smaller map of Maine pasted on the ceiling above the table provide convenient reference points for current event discussions, underscoring the Boatshop's "Think Globally, Act Locally" philosophy.

When discussing their experiences, the apprentices often emphasize the benefits of communal living. "We live together and work together and eat together, even go sailing and hiking and skiing together," says Emily, an apprentice





in her mid-20s. “And then there’s the whole spiritual aspect. The group meshes well; we all want to be here.”

“I’ve never had friends in their 50s and 60s,” adds 24-year-old Kurt. “It’s great to hear their life stories.”

Good Neighbors

Nothing epitomizes Bobby Ives and his ministry more than the concept of service. Reach out. Lend a hand. Lift others. Help your neighbor. Recognize that every person is your neighbor. One of the “Seven Basic Goals for the Boatshop Apprentices” says it well: “To seek each day to live without fear, love without reserve, and willingly work for peace, justice, and the common good of all.”

Apprentices help out in the local community throughout the year—tutoring in the school, shoveling snow off roofs, doing whatever needs to be done. “People always think ‘Maybe the Boatshop can help,’” laughs Bobby, “and they give us a call.”

The Boatshop’s service ethos is very proactive, not just reactive, with CHIP (Community Housing Improvement Program) leading the way. Founded by Ruth Ives,

CHIP’s major activities include collecting funds for buying and distributing fuel to people in need; collecting and redistributing furniture; and helping local families with various home repair projects.

Open Spirituality

“This is a religious institution, but it is not exclusive,” says Mike, an apprentice, a recently retired United Church of Christ minister and a member of the Board of the Carpenter’s Boatshop. Mike, who attended several of the Boatshop’s summer workshops for ministers before becoming an apprentice, adds, “Since I’ve been coming here, we’ve had fundamentalists, Quakers, Buddhists, Jews and people of no faith. There’s no religious polarization, no proselytizing, no attempt to make over anybody. It’s a remarkable model. And, of course, Bobby is an amazing teacher. In the Boatshop, he has incredibly high standards, but he’s so non-judgmental and encouraging, almost apologetic when he makes suggestions. When he leads discussion groups, it’s clear that he is a true Biblical scholar. There’s an equanimity about Bobby; he never gets flustered.”

The Rewards of Giving

"I'm a very blessed person," says Bobby, "doing what I love to do: living by the sea, building boats, building dreams, making dear friends. I am very fortunate."

Ever humble, Bobby is always first to credit others for the remarkable success of the Carpenter's Boatshop. "This is not *my* ministry," he stresses. "It is *our* community."

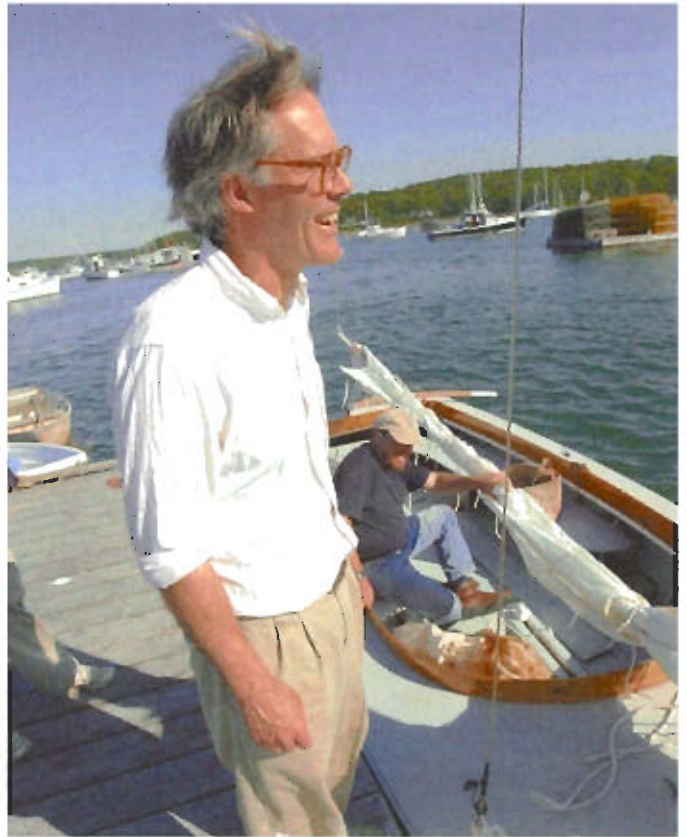
That community is ever-expanding, across the United States and around the world. There are the nearly 250 former apprentices now living around the world, people who have spent nine months in Maine learning lessons about building boats and making choices and living life. Bobby estimates that he and Ruth stay in touch with over 90 percent of their former apprentices, giving extra credit to Ruth who writes four or five letters each day to friends who have called the Boatshop home. There are the ministers and laypeople who have attended summer furniture-making workshops. There are the miscellaneous souls, the scores of people who have just stopped by over the years and stayed for a day or a week or two, just needing a place to rest, to pause, to think, to be.

"We bring humanity together," says Bobby. "When you think about it, we're all in this together—whatever our religion or political party or sexual orientation. We're all seeking love and peace in our hearts."

Voices of Appreciation

To listen to people who've left the Boatshop to go on to do their work in the world is to appreciate the lasting impact of the loving ministry of Bobby and Ruth Ives.

"Bobby helped me answer my call to go into the ministry," says Kim. "The two of them are such an inspirational



couple. They live out their faith in all they do, from the moment they get up until they go to bed."

Mark, now a woodworker, says, "They value the simple things. And if anybody needs a hand, Bobby and Ruth Ives are right there."

Brad, who now restores yachts, says, "Bobby leads by the power of example, the way he lives his life. He walks the walk and talks the talk. He **has amazing** energy, and you can't help being influenced by being around him."

"Bobby proves that in a world filled with choices you can live according to an ideal," says Todd, who works for Habitat for Humanity. "Too many 'Christians' today preach hatred and intolerance, but Bobby lives his faith. He's truly inspiring."

Laura, who met Brad, now her husband, at the Boatshop and also works for Habitat for Humanity, says, "Bobby and Ruth show you can work and live together as a team. And Bobby is sophisticated, yet he lives so simply, so humbly. He sets a wonderful example of how to live your life."

Darin, a former apprentice who now serves as an instructor at the Boatshop, speaks for many who pass through the doors of the Carpenter's Boatshop when he says, "Bobby and Ruth saved my life by making me feel like a million bucks. I aspire to be as generous as they are."

Apprentices to the Carpenter's Boatshop pay nothing to participate nor do they receive any remuneration beyond room and board. The sale of new boats exquisitely crafted by the Boatshop, the restoration of old boats, and private donations cover all expenses. Call the Carpenter's Boatshop (207-677-2614) for details on boats for sale. Or write to: The Carpenter's Boatshop, c/o Reverend & Mrs. Robert E. Ives, Old County Road, Pemaquid, Maine 04558.