

## Sherwood man, ill with cancer, gets wish to sail

A trip on the Columbia River brings back a lifetime of memories

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LARRY BINGHAM— The Oregonian

When 77-year-old Hennie Page went in for hernia repair surgery in late April, doctors found much worse. A mass of cancer in his pancreas and spine. He was given only a few months to live.

At the Avamere care facility in Sherwood where Page lives, Caryn Meier, director of community relations, was grieving the loss of a friend to cancer when Page's news spread. Meier, who had recently been trained about granting wishes for seniors, was talking to Page when an idea came.

The question she asked might confound many of us: If you could experience one thing for what might be the last time, what would it be?

For Page, a South Africa native who retired from running a clothing factory at age 43 and spent years sailing a charter boat in the Caribbean, the answer was easy.

He wanted to sail

Meier Googled "sailing and Portland" and called the first name that appeared. De Henderson of Island Sailing Club at Jantzen Beach answered the phone.

Henderson, who lost his father to pancreatic cancer, told Meier he would be honored to fulfill the request.

"In the sailing community," he says, "there's a real respect for other sailors."

With a light wind and a strong current in the Columbia River, Page set sail late Wednesday afternoon.

Before he left, and before the TV cameras filmed him eating filet mignon and drinking a Heineken --the meal he requested when Meier asked for his favorite --he rode with his daughter, Yolanda Smidt, and his grandsons Ryan and Quewin from the care facility to the marina.

He stopped at the end of the ramp leading to the dock to savor the moment. It had been 10 or 20 years since he sold motor boats and spent his days around the green water lapping at the boats. Around the geese and their goslings bobbing along the water's edge. Around the light breeze now blowing through his thinning gray hair.

Page, who has lost 30 pounds in four months and endured radiation, built the 90-foot Brigantine schooner he chartered in the Caribbean. It took him seven years. The teak that paneled the interior was salvaged from old railroad carriages. The master suite, with its tub of Italian tile, was his own design.

He spent eight years in that boat, sailing tourists around the U.S. Virgin Islands and twice racing from the Cape of South Africa to Rio de Janeiro, before he moved to Portland in 1989.

These days, he surrounds himself with memories of those times and photographs of the boat, which he named Eyola -- a merger of his son's and daughter's names.

He has always been an extrovert and adventurer, his daughter says, and he felt he had lost some of the pleasures and freedoms of his younger life when he moved to a care facility.

Until Wednesday, when he stepped back into a boat and sailed away.

Larry Bingham: 503-221-8262; larrybingham@news.oregonian.com