

Ethelbert Nevin II

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BLUE HILL — Ethelbert Nevin II, an experienced sailor who raced and cruised on both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and supported that habit with his day job as a college textbook salesman, died Sept. 23, 2013, at his home in Blue Hill, at the age of 80.

Mr. Nevin died from the effects of prostate cancer.

Mr. Nevin, who was known variously as “Berto” or “Bert,” lived much of his adult life in San Francisco, but called Blue Hill his real home — his sisters and brother lived near him, as did his 35-foot Cheoy Lee sloop, Curlew. In 1980, Mr. Nevin made his longest sea voyage — sailing Curlew 7,000 miles from San Francisco to Blue Hill. It took nine months — down the California coast, through the Panama Canal and over the Caribbean Sea and up the East Coast to Maine. A few years ago, he sold Curlew because he said the wooden boat was getting too expensive to maintain.

Mr. Nevin was born May 17, 1933, in Boston and spent his early years in Darien, Conn., and Great Neck, N.Y. During World War II, Mr. Nevin’s father, Paul Nevin, taught celestial navigation at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, also known as Kings Point. (Mr. Nevin’s grandfather, Ethelbert Nevin, was the 19th century composer best known for the songs “Mighty Lak’ a Rose” and “Narcissus.”) Mr. Nevin graduated from St. Paul’s School, Concord, N.H., in 1952. He attended Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio;

Columbia School of General Studies in New York, and graduated from Union College, Schenectady, N.Y., in 1958 with a B.A. degree in English.

Mr. Nevin spent two years as a soldier in the U.S. Army's 4th Armored Division in what was then called West Germany. While there, he bought a gray 1963 Karmann-Ghia roadster, which he shipped back to the U.S. and kept in Maine. Until a few weeks ago, Mr. Nevin could be seen driving the car, top down, on roads around Blue Hill. On returning to the U.S. after his Army service, Mr. Nevin was hired as a college textbook salesman by the American Book Co. His territory was New England and he and his colleagues were known as college travelers, given that they spent a lot of time driving from campus to campus, plying their wares. Mr. Nevin liked to say he was ideally suited for the job — never having read any of his textbooks while he was a student himself, he said he therefore had no preconceived notions of what made for a good textbook or a bad textbook. He also noted that he accepted all promotional sales hype uncritically.

His textbook orthodoxy notwithstanding, Mr. Nevin enjoyed slyly dropping puns and palindromes into the conversation whenever he thought they were needed. (E.g., Yreka Bakery). He once described a palindrome as “a small friend who meets you at the airport.” Mr. Nevin also was the subject, years ago, of a story in *The New Yorker*, occasioned by the theft of an old harpsichord from his home in Maine. Somehow, the harpsichord made its way to San Francisco, when Mr. Nevin was still living there and a Maine detective even called him up and asked him to go have a look at the harpsichord, which had been seized by police and booked into custody.

After three years with American Book, Mr. Nevin moved to the publishing firm W.W. Norton & Co. In 1964, Mr. Nevin moved to San Francisco and took over a wide-ranging sales territory that took him all over California, Alaska, the Pacific Northwest and Hawaii. It was while he was in San Francisco that he bought *Curlew*, in 1975, a boat he kept in Sausalito and sailed mostly around San Francisco Bay and, occasionally, up the coast to Bodega Bay and down to Monterey Bay.

Mr. Nevin found, after sailing around the California coast, that he missed cruising the craggy coast of Maine. In 1979, Mr. Nevin was chatting with a professor friend in Bakersfield, Calif. The friend told him of a recent voyage he had made far out in the Pacific to the South Sea islands on his Westsail 32. This stirred Mr. Nevin's blood. It was time to take Curlew out for a long sail.

Mr. Nevin took an unpaid leave from his book-selling job, packed up the boat and left San Francisco Bay in October 1979. Along the way, he would pick up a friend as crew, then other crew members would leave. It was a rotation of various crew members through the nine-month voyage, which ended when he sailed into Blue Hill Bay in July 1980. Curlew stayed in Maine and Mr. Nevin cruised her throughout New England and up past Nova Scotia to the end of Cape Breton Island.

In 1995, Mr. Nevin left San Francisco and moved permanently to Blue Hill. He retired from W.W. Norton in 1996 and at the end of the year married Jennifer Mitchell, a fine art curator who is the daughter of Ellinor Mitchell, a lifelong friend of Jane Guinness, Mr. Nevin's sister.

Mr. Nevin was a past commodore of the Kollegewidgwok Yacht Club, in Blue Hill, and was a member of the Cruising Club of America. Until shortly before his death, he was editing *The Waterline*, the newsletter of Mr. Nevin's yacht club.

In addition to his sister, Jane Guinness, Mr. Nevin's survivors include his wife, Jennifer Mitchell-Nevin, of the family home in Blue Hill; his brother, Crocker Nevin; and numerous nieces and nephews; great-nieces and great-nephews.

The family suggests contributions to KSEA Sailing School, Kollegewidgwok Yacht Club, P.O. Box 473, Blue Hill ME 04614; the Blue Hill Library, 5 Parker Point Road, Blue Hill, ME 04614.