

This is Bob'

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Memorial in Stony Creek honors life of Volsunga IV captain

Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — They lined up, roughly 250 Thimble Islanders, on shore at Stony Creek's Madeira Park, as part of a memorial service for the life of Capt. Bob Milne, the beloved captain of the Thimble Islands Cruise's Volsunga IV, died in September 2018 at 58.

During Hurricane Irene, Pastor Jacobson told the assembly, he and Milne stood on the front lawn of the church overlooking The Sound.

There, they watched a sailboat break loose and head straight across the waters, "taking bets on where it was going to end up," he said. "So were we," someone from the crowd called out, as the breeze picked up, knocking down the floral sprays on either side of him.

Whereupon Pastor Wayne, after recruiting John "Mr. Stony Creek" Barnes and Peter Kusterer to hold up the sprays, encouraged the sharing of stories about Capt. Bob, with the winking assurance that "we are among friends."

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"This is who he is, this is the part that will live on..."

Kevin Swanson, brother-in-law



Lucy Milne / Contributed photos

Scene from Capt. Bob Milne memorial at Madeira Park, with Thimble Islanders in boats by shore assembled in tribute to Capt. Bob Milne

CAPTAIN

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That kind of homespun familiarity seemed fitting for a place where, after injuries threatened the life of Milne when his motorcycle collided with a pickup truck in 2015, the small coastal community rallied around his daughter Anna and her mother Beth; where, as Anna, the latest captain of the Volsunga IV, has said, "everyone's family, whether it's blood family or not."

It seemed right for a place that was, as Bob's sister Jane Swanson put it,

"every fiber of Bob's body."

He was "our curly, golden-haired baby brother," said Swanson, one of his five siblings, who grew up a stone's throw from the Stony Creek town dock with "an assortment of bikes and boats that for the most part worked," "picnics on Hen Island," and "peanut butter and jelly sandwiches gobbled down on the pink-topped granite rock that is Stony Creek."

He was a figure who "oozed creativity," as Creeker Barry Levine described him, and not just on the Volsunga, which he took over from

Capt. Dwight Carter at 26; who, for close to three decades, entertained visitors and tourists with stories about the trials of Tom Thumb and Cut-in-Two Island "as intricately crafted as a New Yorker piece," as Yankee Magazine put it.

He was a talented artist, as exhibited by a T-shirt worn by John Barnes depicting undersea King Triton, which Capt. Bob designed.

"It took an hour for me to find it in my attic this morning," Barnes, who was also sporting a blue heron pin made by Capt. Bob, said after the ceremo-



Lucy Milne / Contributed photo

From left, pastor Wayne Jacobson, Beth Milne, Anna Milne, and Peter Kusterer at memorial for Capt. Bob Milne on Saturday, Sept. 14 at Stony Creek's Madeira Park.

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He was a guitarist who recorded a CD of original songs, Levine said. He crafted poetry and prose from the impressions he jotted down in his daily log, about belted kingfisher with "the spiked hair of a punk rocker" and American oyster catchers "constantly calling to one another with a loud shrill keelp." These he collected and published in his 2005 "Thimble Islands Story-book: A Captain's View."

He was a character, known for his impish sense of humor. He coined the Indian name for kayak as always-in-the-way, Creeker Denny Ghysseis recalled, and wryly included in his storybook an essay titled "I Want to Be a Captain," written by a fifth-grader.

It was Mike Infantino, captain of the Sea Mist Thimble Island cruise boat and Milne's childhood friend, who read aloud the reasons — among them, "it's a fun job and easy to do," and "captains make more money than they can spend" — as the wind swirled, riffling his papers, and boats bobbed and knocked against the moorings, and the sun flitted in and out of clouds.

"This is Bob," said his brother-in-law Kevin Swanson, before a bagpipe wailed "Amazing Grace," Creeker Josh Greenval tolled the bell from the Volsunga III eight times for the passing of a captain, and Pastor Wayne asked everyone to send the flowers from the sprays out to sea.

"This is who he is, this is the part that will live on, this is what has been here forever, and it's going to be here forever, these boats, these people out here, are what Bob is."

It was all of them, "all of you," Beth Milne, joined by Anna, told the assembly, who ensured "the