

THE STORY BEHIND TY'S REEF

By Fred Golofaro



A group of youngsters from YES ready to board a Peregrine Foundation sponsored Send A Kid Fishing trip out of Captree this summer.



I was asked what the Ty's Reef decal on my car window was about by another fisherman at Democrat Point one evening last week. The reef, part of The Fisherman Reef in Great South Bay, is the legacy of a local resident, Ty Hellriegel, who died too young in a tragic boating accident on the bay he loved. His story, and that of the reef in his name, follows.

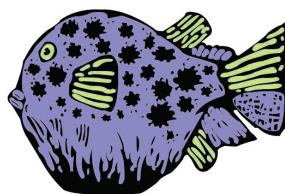
Ty Hellriegel was born and raised in Bay Shore, Long Island. His love for the sea, mirrored in his brilliant blue eyes, began as a young child. He caught his first big shark at age five and refinished his first little outboard dinghy when he was only eight. He spent much of his free time as a child water-skiing, clamping, drawing and writing about the sea. As he grew, so did the size of his boats. He moved from dinghies, to whalers, to speedboats and finally to the *Peregrine* over which you will fish today. He graduated from art school and began making a living as a commercial artist.

In 1989, Ty discovered the *Peregrine* abandoned in a Florida boat yard. The *Peregrine* was a 60-foot replica of a two-masted 16th century Pirate Ship with two masts stretching 55 feet into the sky. It had rows of windows high on its stern and made Ty think of the courageous Vikings he admired. Ty fell in love and knew that he had found his home. Ty settled the yard bill of the previous owner and sailed the *Peregrine* north to Orawoc Creek in Islip. The *Peregrine* became his art studio and home for the rest of his life.

Ty had always been a free spirit, dreaming that one day he would sail the *Peregrine* back south to Key West and spend his days painting and selling his art at sunset on Duval Street.

On a stormy night, September 21, 2001, Ty hopped aboard his friend's boat and headed to Fire Island as he so often did. That night, Ty drowned in a terrible boating accident. He was only 35 years old. His friends and family knew that he wanted a "Viking Funeral," the kind where a body lashed on a boat is drifted to sea and set afire. But that's against the law these days; burning was not an op-

TY'S REEF



Great South Bay, L.I.
New York

tion. So after a church funeral, Ty's family discovered that his friends had made a small replica of the *Peregrine* and planned to launch it through the surf off Fire Island and set it ablaze. They rigged a little mast on it, wove strands of Ty's blonde hair around it and placed his purple pants on board. Purple was Ty's favorite color. The mini *Peregrine* burned as a hundred friends and family watched from the shore serenaded by his favorite music.

His family toiled with the urgent question, "What to do with the *Peregrine*?" They knew they couldn't sell her. Ty and the *Peregrine* were as inseparable as mast and sail. They decided that the best memorial to him would be to sink his beloved *Peregrine* and make it part of a permanent fishing reef in the Great South Bay that he loved. His spirit, his home and art studio could somehow keep living on in these waters that were so much a part of his life.

The official sinking of the boat was approved by the Department of Conservation and the United States Coast Guard thanks to Fred Golofaro and *The Fisherman Magazine*. The boat was stripped of its masts and gutted in preparation. Ty's family snuck aboard a few mementos they felt ought to go down with the boat: Ty's crazy purple combat boots, which they nailed to the wooden floors, and a snapshot of Binky, his favorite cat. On

May 3, the *Peregrine* was towed out to The Fisherman Reef just southwest of the WR buoy along South Beach, Fire Island battling high winds with gusts over 35 mph. Upon arrival, it was filled with concrete, drilled with holes and filled with water. As Ty's family and friends looked on from a flotilla of private boats, the *Peregrine* slowly returned to the sea. The reef that has grown around the *Peregrine*, Ty's Reef, was born and has become a living source of beauty and refuge for all who venture upon it.

Ty was a special guy. People were drawn to Ty because of his kindness. He found joy in the simpler things in life and had a wild smile that was contagious. The avid sailor and fisherman - a man who was often referred to as the Ernest Hemingway of Long Island - left behind a legacy of friendship and passion for life that was skillfully expressed in his poetry and artwork.

The Ty Hellriegel Peregrine Foundation (www.tysreef.org) regularly takes youth fishing over Ty's Reef, because we know he'd want other kids to share the joy of the sea that captured his heart. We hope that as these youngsters fish over the *Peregrine* that they will feel his spirit and enjoy the sea breeze, sea gulls, and spectacular vistas that inspired his art and his life. His crystal blue eyes always shined so brightly. We hope they will feel that light as the sun dances off the waves.

Ty's Sisters:

Jen, Heather & Caroline