

On Eyesores: (Spirit of) Town Hall and the Return of the Intrepid

TRANSCRIPT:

Good morning and thank you so much for coming to this special, para-Fleet Week activity. As it turns out, it's fortunate that we're here with our supplementary flotilla. I learned yesterday from the Navy press office that the Parade of Ships is the shortest and most understated in years. Not because, the spokesperson assured me, the Navy is "running low on ships due to the global war on terror", but because there are not enough "parking spots" for warships here on the Hudson!

I'm Marget Long and I'm here to share with you, among other things, a bit of recent maritime history:

I began this project this past winter when, walking along the Hudson River, I noticed twin absences: Uptown, on Pier 86, the USS Intrepid, the WWII aircraft carrier and home of the Intrepid Air and Space Museum, was missing. It was dry docked for a multi-million dollar makeover on Staten Island. Downtown, where we're standing now, a boat called the *Town Hall* was also missing. It was the ramshackle, floating home of artists and misfits that quietly disappeared from our city in 2000.



Intrepid Returns (224 Days), Marget Long (2008)

What exactly was the *Town Hall*?

The *Town Hall* was a boat made out of garbage by a group of musicians—a true eyesore and thing of beauty!



Town Hall, photography courtesy of Floating Neutrinos website.
<http://www.floatingneutrinos.com/>

In 1987, a man named David Pearlman and his band (called the *Flying Neutrinos*) drove from Mexico to New York City. Their plan was to live in their truck at 65th Street and Broadway until they got a job playing music with the circus.



David Pearlman and Betsy Terrell, photograph courtesy of Floating Neutrinos website, <http://www.floatingneutrinos.com/>.

They set up house up there, alongside Lincoln Center, until one night Pearlman dreamt that if the band dressed up like Pilgrims they could make more money. The band members took this to mean that they should move to Provincetown, Massachusetts—a place where they thought—and rightly so—that Pilgrim musicians might be valued.



(*Spirit of*) *Town Hall*, flotilla details, Marget Long (2008)

Once in Provincetown the band was given a condemned barge, on top of which they built house out of scrap wood, old docks, Styrofoam and other debris they found on the beach. They were also given spare motor parts from the generator of Provincetown's Town Hall (hence the name of their ultimate creation).

The band added giant, multi-colored paddle wheels to the barge's bow. The boat became more and more elaborate. It was docked at a pier in the center of Provincetown and many of the locals (Queers and Pilgrims alike) thought it was unsightly and bad for business. Eventually the town officials asked the *Flying Neutrinos* to leave. They reluctantly decided to paddle back NY.

Pearlman and his troupe left via the Cape Cod Canal—at the dignified pace of turtles—in the winter of 1989. It was not an easy trip; they ran aground many times, the Technicolor paddles got stuck in the mud; and they were finally towed into New York harbor by the Coast Guard.

They Coast Guard dropped the Town Hall at Amazon Village, a late-80's hotspot that offered the dual pleasures drinking and bungee jumping, here at the old Pier 25. When Pearlman walked up the gangway, legend has it that the actor Jack Nicholson greeted him and said, "You have a great looking vessel."

That great-looking vessel was anchored here for the next eleven years. Other oddball boats latched on—the *Child of the Amazon* and a mastless sailboat owned by a Hungarian artist. Musicians, artists and other floaters-on came and went. The *Town Hall* also served as a construction site for the even larger and crazier trash raft, *Son of Town Hall*, which Pearlman and his crew later sailed across the Atlantic.



Son of Town Hall, photograph courtesy of Floating Neutrinos website.
<http://www.floatingneutrinos.com/>

As gentrification of this area intensified throughout the 90s, *Town Hall's* days were numbered. Sparkling glass condos sprang up and the Hudson River Park Trust (HRPT) finalized plans for a revamped park. The former industrial zone was to be cleared for tennis courts, boardwalks and native grasses. There was no place in anyone's master plan for a sloppy, ad-hoc, communal, 24/7 meeting and living space for artists.



Would Peter Hujar Play Here?, Marget Long, 2008

On May 8, 2000, HRPT hired a towing company to remove the *Town Hall* and its spawn. They towed the boats up to Pier 41 and in the process of lifting them onto a trash barge they broke apart. HRPT declared a clean-up incident.



Could Peter Hujar Play Here? Marget Long, 2008

Pearlman aptly said about this moment, "How ironic that this symbol of creative recycling, which never created any pollution anywhere it went, instead it gathered and transformed the debris of an over-industrialized society into working art, should end up as a clean-up incident."



Could Peter Hujar's Boyfriend Be Here? Marget Long, 2008

To honor the *Town Hall* I hereby launch this recreation, the
(*Spirit of*) *Town Hall*.

Someone please do the honors (sprinkle with river water)



(*Spirit of*) *Town Hall*, documentation by Nelson Figallo and John Enxuto (2008).

Here's to trashy, friendly eyesores built for

Music,

Creativity,

Community,

Hope,

Happiness,

Sloppy, rent-free living;

Peace and Love.

Marget Long
May 21, 2008

*As most people are aware, political expression is far more strictly controlled in NY since 9/11 and the passage of the Patriot Act. Through experience, I learned that the HRPT is especially rigid on these matters. (Each time I shoot my portraits on the West Side Highway I'm stopped within minutes by security guards.) So for this project, I decided to "go legit" and seek film permit, which I thought would be much easier to obtain than a permit for a public (art/political) gathering during a military event sanctioned by the city! So with the omission of a few crucial details—like the fact that my main objective was to gather as many people as possible for a social/political purpose—I was granted a permit to film (my event). The

security guards showed up, but after I had finished reading, and after we had rather clumsily launched our counter-flotilla. I flashed my permit (and my white skin) and they left us alone.

For more information on the *Town Hall* and other amazing floating creations by David Pearlman, please visit his website.
<http://www.floatingneutrinos.com/>

For a complete listing of regulated activities in the Hudson River Park, please see HRPT's 40 page [Rules and Regulations](#). See especially, the definition of "Floating Structures" on page 4.

I'm also indebted to the research on Poppa Neutrino by Alec Wilkinson, author of *The Happiest Man in the World: An Account of the Life of Poppa Neutrino* (Random House, 2007).