

# Clark Mills, designer of the Optimist

**Clark Mills, who died in December 2001 was the original designer of the Optimist.**

The story is well-known of how in 1947 he responded to the request from the local Optimist businessmen's club to design a marine equivalent of soap-box derby cars. Twenty six boats were built in the first year, mostly by Clark himself, and, even before building started in Europe in 1954, there were almost 1,500 Optimists in the U.S.A.

Bill Douglas, editor of U.S. Optinews, who knew Clark well has written:

**“Through the Optimist Clark managed to touch the souls of hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of young sailors, for over half a century and all round the world.”**

Clark was modest about his achievement. In 1987 he wrote:

“I don't mind taking the blame for designing the pram but I have talked myself blue trying to explain that I was just one of many, many people who had promoted the program and got it rolling. All this happened some forty years ago and the media keep insisting that I take all the credit.”

but he had no illusions about his talent:

“I think I'm the best designer in the United States. I'm damn good. I've got the splinters and the backache to

prove it.”

Nor was he a man to mince words. About the 15-year age limit he wrote:

“All of a sudden in two to three years a kid can turn into a monster. Not all of them but a lot of them - too many greaseburgers, I guess.”

In a changing world of 'political correctness' Clark sometimes felt that he was obsolete. He wasn't, nor was his his philosophy:

“A boat, by God, its just a gleamin' beautiful creation. And when you pull the sail up on a boat, you've got a little bit of really somethin' God-given. Man, it goes bleetin' off like a bird wing, you know, and there's nothin' else like it.”

**May we be worthy of his legacy: we could do a lot worse.**

