

# Elaine Edwards McChristian

The woman with the man who made Seamaster fly reels

By Ron Gast

We've all heard this idiom before: "Behind every successful man there is a woman." Is it truth or a myth? Sometimes it is the woman that encourages the man to take the risks that are usually necessary for him to become successful. There is also another way to look at this relationship. The woman and the man complements each other making them both successful. Such is the case with Elaine and Robert McChristian.

Like most fishermen and collectors, we have all heard of Seamaster reels. My interest in Seamaster became elevated when I had the opportunity to acquire a collection of them. The person who had them knew the Seamaster inventor, Robert L. McChristian Jr. He and his wife were friends with Robert and Elaine McChristian. It was from this person that I learned how much a role Elaine played in Robert's life. This got my curiosity up and I had to learn more. This is the story I'd like to tell about Elaine. The following is a chronological record of the life of Elaine and Robert McChristian.

But first, we have to talk about the man Robert Lee McChristian, Jr. He was later known to his friends as Capt. Mack. Robert was born in New York City on August 1, 1912. The 1920 Chicago census shows Robert, his parents and his three brothers living there. The father is listed as being employed as a machinist for an automobile manufacturer. By 1922, the family had moved to Miami, Florida. Robert is listed in the August 11, 1922 *Miami News* as a member of the Royal Order of Whales swimming team. Robert's love of the water was perhaps a prelude of things to come.

Early in his life, Robert was surely influenced by his father Robert L. McChristian Sr. The father's



Photo of Elaine McChristian with a Seamaster spinning reel

obituary says he was a machinist and inventor. He owned the Mack towing company in the late 1920s, was the captain of his own charter boat and originator of the Model Works in the 1930s.

In the November 13, 1938 *Miami News* is an article about Robert McChristian Sr.'s business as a patent model manufacturer. Also, in the March 23, 1941 newspaper is an article about his invention of a vending machine that dispenses a single lighted cigarette for one cent. We will later learn that inventiveness would run in the family.

## Ideas Are Worth Fortunes, Patent Model Maker Claims

**"If You Can't Condemn  
'Em, Give 'Em Trial,  
He Advises**

By JANE DESENBERY,  
Daily News Staff Writer.

"If you get an idea for an invention, don't stick it in the back of your head," advises R. L. McChristian, patent model manufacturer at 11 N. E. Fifth st. "Even if it seems silly, try to run it down. Condemn it if you can; if you can't, give it a trial."

McChristian says that contrary to popular belief, 90 per cent of the inventors who come to him with plans are not dreamers, but practical people with sound ideas. The other 10 per cent however, have their heads in the clouds and think up countless schemes for perpetual motion, airplanes without wings and house gadgets which would frighten the most intrepid housekeeper.

Inventors usually are middle-aged, seldom young. They are mechanically minded or electrical-minded, seldom both. If their ideas are shown to be impractical, they admit it and start on something else, claims this model manufacturer.

Many of the devices brought to McChristian by clients become successful. One is a meter spray developed by a government engineer to disinfect the interior of airplanes when they enter foreign countries. This spray allows for measurement of just enough fluid to kill the germs but spare the passengers.

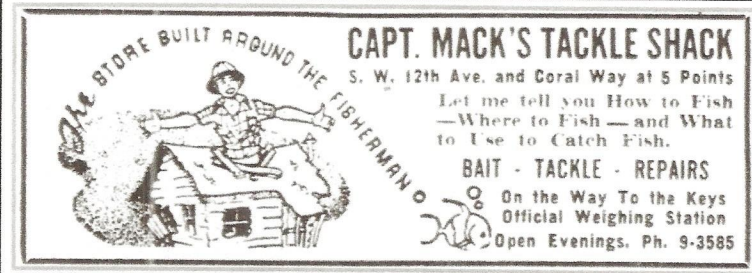
One young lady won a prize with

her table for invalids; a device whereby the person ailed gazes through a magnifying glass at reading matter, dinner, or a manufacturing set on a table some distance away.

A man solved the problem of putting the front and back seats of an automobile together to form a bed. Another invented an automatic light that flashes when the car makes a turn. One man invented a power rabbit for the dog races on which the wheels are part of the engine. There's even a device for launching three life-boats at the same time complete with passengers.

"I've invented an engine which uses nothing but water for fuel," McChristian claims. "If anybody doesn't believe it, just let them come down here and I'll show them. It's a combination of steam, two cycle internal combustion and full type diesel engine. It has no valves, no gears, no carburetor, no spark plugs and carries no compression. Instead of a fly wheel, there is a direct current dynamo which separates atoms of water and makes hydrogen. The hydrogen explodes in the cylinder head and there's absolutely no fuel cost except for lubrication oil. The motor is the size of an Austin engine and develops 100 horse power."

McChristian says he wouldn't invent things himself if it weren't worth while. "Some ideas are pretty wild," he says, "like one man's plan to make a sterilizer for the inside of shoes so people wouldn't get athlete's foot. I won't bother with the ideas for perpetual mo-



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S. W. 12th Ave. and Coral Way at 5 Points  
Let me tell you How to Fish  
—Where to Fish — and What  
to Use to Catch Fish.  
**BAIT - TACKLE - REPAIRS**  
On the Way To the Keys  
Official Weighing Station  
Open Evenings. Ph. 9-3585

Capt. Mack's March 23, 1947 Advertisement in The Miami News

## Inventor Dies Here At 67

Services will be held for Robert L. McChristian, 67, of 3586 NW 41st St. He died at his home yesterday.

Mr. McChristian, an inventor and machinist, came here from Chicago in 1917. He owned the Mack Towing Co. during the building boom here in the late 1920s.

He was the captain of his own charter boat in the 1930s, and originator of the Model Works.

Surviving are three sons, Robert L., of Miami; Col. Joseph A., of Monterey, Calif. and Air Force Lt. Stanley E., of Boise, Ida.

Robert McChristian Sr.'s obituary in the September 10, 1955 Miami News

In the early 1950s is when we see Bob becoming a major supporter of spinning tackle. His love for the spinning reel was often discouraged by the lack of its capability. Catching large fish with a reel will test its capability. Bob would later improve on the spinning reel design.

In the late 1950s is when we see Elaine becoming more of a public person at social events. She and Bob were now well known in the Miami social circles. Elaine began modeling at various events and promoting the "McChristian" name.

While Elaine became more involved with social events, Bob finally had enough of the spinning reels that were available. In the late 1950s, Bob designed his own spinning reel that could withstand the demands of catching large fish. It was reported in *The Miami News* in 1957 that Bob was now manufacturing his spinning reel design.

The reel was only available for a short time in the late 1950s because it became too expensive to manufacture. Bob stopped making the spinning reel and started making fly reels designed for the harsh, corrosive environment that came with saltwater fishing. This was the beginning of the "Seamaster" line of salmon, tarpon and marlin reels.

All during this time, Elaine continued to be in the news with her record catches.

The Miami News records how Elaine was a member of the Women's Auxiliary to the Miami Outboard Motor Club and entertained at the opening of their new clubhouse. It was a variety show with members of the Auxiliary entertaining. In the 1960s and 1970s, Elaine and Bob eased out of the social limelight. Their new endeavor was the perfection of his fly reel designs. The three features he included were light weight, a smooth drag and anodized finish required for the salt environment.

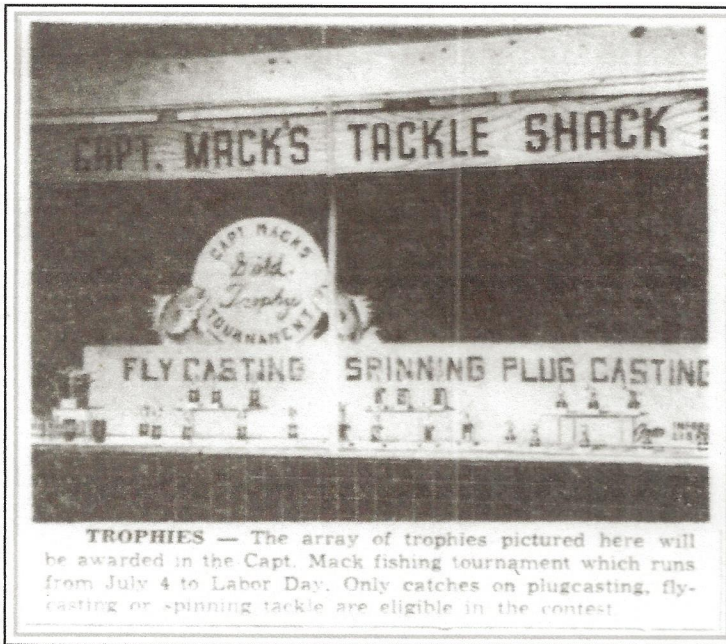
McChristian Sr. article in the November 13, 1938 Miami News newspaper

In 1944 is the first time we see the relationship between Robert, Jr. and Elaine come to light. On their application for a marriage license, Bob is shown as being 32 years old and a passenger agent for Eastern Airlines in Miami. Elaine is shown as seven years younger and was born in Havana, Cuba. Both were previously married and divorced.

In 1947, Robert started advertising his business as "Capt. Mack's Tackle Shack." In the late 1940s and early 1950s we see Capt. Mack and his wife Elaine becoming very active in fishing and casting contests.

In 1949, Capt. Mack upped his game by including his beautiful wife in his advertisements. In the newspaper fishing reports are more and more records of Bob and Elaine's record fish catches. They were also both heavily involved in tournament casting. Their reputations as both great fishers and successful tournament participants began to explode. This was definitely great for business.

Elaine and Bob continued to be active with fishing and casting tournaments. She received a lot of notoriety when she caught an 8-pound bonefish on 5-pound test line.



Capt. Mack's August 21, 1949 Fishing Tournament announcement in The Miami News

**SPINNING EQUIPMENT**  
Miami's Outstanding Spinning Organization

- MITCHELL SPINNING REELS
- CAPT. MACK'S CUSTOM-BUILT RODS
- COMPLETE SELECTION OF LURES

**THREE RECORDS HELD ON OUR EQUIPMENT**

- 1 BONEFISH—9-lbs.—12-oz. on 5-lb. line
- 2 BONEFISH—6-lbs.—5-oz. on 2 1/2-lb. line
- 3 LADIES FIRST BONEFISH—6-lbs.—4-oz. on 5-lb. line

See picture on right ALL CAUGHT ON ARTIFICIAL LURES

**ONLY DEALER IN MIAMI WITH MORE THAN 2 YEARS EXPERIENCE AND OVER 1000 FISH ON SPINNING EQUIPMENT**

**CAPT. MACK'S TACKLE SHACK**  
S.W. 12th AVE. PH. 9-3585  
AND CORAL WAY

Elaine McChristian featured in the October 16, 1949 ad in The Miami News

**BRYAN WINS SKISH MEET**  
Chicago Caster Takes Title at Miami

MIAMI, July 6—(AP)—Clare Bryan, of Chicago, flipped a fishing fly 130 feet across a man-made lake today to win the national skish fly distance contest in the second annual skish tournament.

Bryan averaged 130 feet in three out of five casts. John Dieckman, Paterson, N. J., averaged 127 feet for second position, and Ed Miller, Eustace, Fla., averaged 105 1/3 for third honors.

In the women's division, Joan Salgado, Paterson, N. J., averaged 117 1/3 feet in three out of five casts for first place. Yesterday she won the women's national fly accuracy competition.

Second in the women's division was Belle Mathers, Miami, with a 63 1/3 average. Beverly Allen, South Bend, Ind., was third at 57 2/3 feet.

Miami youths swept all three places in the junior fly distance contest. Elaine Watkins won at 118 foot average. Chet Mosley was second with 100 feet, and Leo Corti third with 92 1/3.

Barney Berlinger, Philadelphia, averaged 237 2/3 feet in three out of five casts to win the national distance skish bait casting tournament. Bill Hill, Miami, was second at 216 2/3 and Paul Mashburn, Sr., Daytona Beach, third at 213 2/3.

Miami women took all three places in the women's bait distance contest. Joe Becorest won at 166 2/3 average. Dot Hill, 161 2/3 was second, and Mrs. Robert McChristian, third at 149.

Elaine's tournament distance casting success reported in July 7, 1950 article in The Miami News

**The Women Whipped Them**

When the ladies of the Rod and Reel Club go on a weekend fishing expedition they make it count. Elaine McChristian was the winner and champion mermaid for 1959 with 11 entries for 1,399 points. Virginia Pappas was a close second with 15 entries and 1,257 points. She also nabbed the outstanding catch prize with her 24-pound amberjack on 20-pound line.

Elaine was again mentioned in this Miami News article on November 24, 1959.

By the 1980s, The Seamaster reel was considered by all fishermen to be the epitome of salt water fly reels. Numerous articles were written about the reel and the man. Nowhere is mentioned the contributions of Elaine to his success, although I'm sure she was happy for Bob and enjoyed seeing the praise he received for his reels.

Elaine McChristian died Aug. 2, 2018, at the age of 99.

Her obituary said she had attended the University of Miami, worked for Eastern Airlines, was a fashion model, and retired after 21 years with Miami-Dade Water & Sewer Authority.

Elaine McChristian's obituary also lists her as the co-founder of Seamaster fishing reels. Looks like in the end she finally got some recognition.

More Seamaster reel photos can be seen at <https://luresnreels.com/seamaster.html>



The Seamaster Spinning Reel (Photos courtesy of Crossroads Angling Auction)

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Nassau, Bahamas — Spinning tackle will get a workout this week in the Bahamas by Stafford L. Sands, chairman of the Bahamas Development Board, and his guest, Bob McChristian of Miami, aboard the Lapan.

McChristian, who operates Capt. Mack's Tackle Shop, is one of the leading exponents of spinning tackle in Miami. They will fish the waters around the Berry Islands.

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Bob's spinning reel interest reported in the July 12, 1951 The Miami News

This chap, Bob McChristian, calls the spinning reel "the perfect instrument for modern fishing."

He demonstrated his point on our trip by rigging up with a husky, nine - and - half ounce jig that he molds himself. He left off the bucktail entirely. But to the big 10-0 hook he affixed a whole squid.

The first drop with this oversize bait was made in about 150 feet of water straight off the Triumph reef can marker. Before the bait hit bottom he had a heavy strike. The fish moved off swiftly and we cranked up to chase. Whatever it was got off about ten minutes later by simply spitting out the hook.

At one point Bob had out 225 yards of his 15-pound mono line. His oversize reel holds 375 yards and with a larger spool, up to 475 yards. Dissatisfied with the tackle available, Bob designed and now manufactures this handmade custom spinning reel for big-game fishing.

The Seamaster Spinning Reel mentioned in the May 19, 1957 Miami News

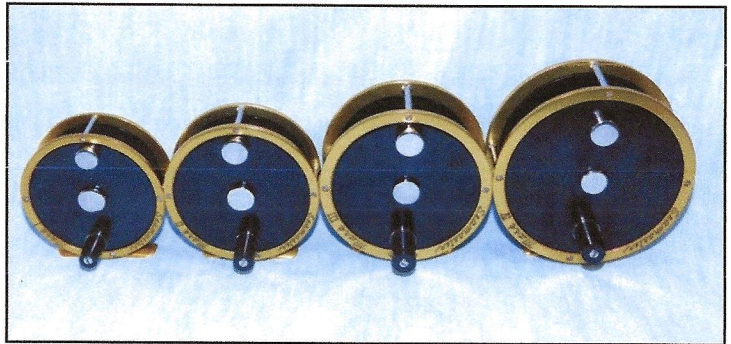
**Miami Woman Fishing Queen**

Mrs. Elaine McChristian of Miami has been chosen queen of the fourth annual Florida Keys Summer Fishing tournament. The selection of Mrs. Christian was based on her entry of an eight-pound bonefish taken on spinning tackle with five-pound test line. Mrs. McChristian will preside over the Keys tournament awards night program at the Legion home in Tavernier next Saturday.

Elaine McChristian's fishing success reported in the September 10, 1950 Miami News

**CAN THESE GALS CAN CAN?**  
Mrs. Askins, Mrs. Spinks, Mrs. McChristian

A photo, at left, in the June 2, 1960 Miami News included Elaine McChristian, seated at right.



A collection of Seamaster fly reels in different sizes and designs.



A January 1981 Outdoor Life article about Bob McChristian showed him at work in his shop on Seamaster fly reels, his famous design.

Bob McChristian of Coral Gables, Florida, works five days and six nights each week handcrafting the prized Seamaster reels. Only a few parts are not machined in his shop. Originally the former charterboat skipper designed spinning reels; now he spends his time crafting fly reels.

Photography by Art Carter

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