

Diary of a Novice Paddler 2004

Debbie Giroux paddles with the Tuesday False Creek Boat.



Saturday April 3/04 – What a beautiful day it was today, we certainly couldn't have asked for better weather. The novice practice was just great. I wasn't really sure what to expect having never even see a dragon boat up close but it was really fun. We started with a high energy warm up led by Juanita this included novices, Cape Town Crew, experienced paddlers and even a few guests. After the warm up all the novices posed for photos as a group and then grouped with other novice team mates. The novices then broke off into two smaller groups, and were joined by experienced paddlers to help us with the ins and outs of paddling. Dr. Don Mackenzie led my group thru the basics of paddling, we had a run thru on the grassy knoll and then into the boats we went. Dr. Don assessed us and adjusted some hips and shoulders and we were off, all I can say is, it was

fantastic.

We paddled out into False Creek and ran thru a couple of drills and then headed back to the dock. We were fortunate to have on board with us a camera man from Shaw TV so we may get a chance to have a record of our first jaunt on the water. It was really quite thrilling to view our lovely city from a different perspective. We also had an opportunity to view a magnificent bird perched high in a tree pretty sure it was a heron, it was quite something to see. I must extend a special thank you the experienced paddlers who came along to show us how it is done and help us and were there for us to follow as we tried to paddle as one. All in all it was a great day and I can hardly wait for Tuesday.

Tuesday April 6, 2004 – What a beautiful evening. The sun was out, the sky was clear and the water was calm. This was my first paddle with the team, a unique experience for me as I haven't been part of a "Team Sport" since the 70's. As everyone arrived we received our life vests (WOW! we really look like a professional team) and introduced ourselves. We gathered together for a warm up led by our coaches and others injecting their favorite warm up exercise, we even had a few young girls who were strolling by lead us in a few exercises. I'm sure they thought we were nuts when we asked them to give us a few ideas. Then we lined up and into the boat we went. We paddled out a little and then started on the process of learning what we are supposed to be doing out there on the water. The focus was decidedly more inside our boat as we learned the techniques our coaches prefer. I definitely used a few muscles that have been lying dormant for more years that I care to admit, and I am sure even more will let me know they exist as we start to really get into correct form. Our captain rewarded us all with much needed Jujube's while we waited

for the dock master to guide us into the dock. After a brief stretch we were done until next Tuesday. We had a good practice and I felt very exhilarated by the whole experience.

Tuesday April 13, 2004 – We have been very fortunate with the weather even though the forecast said rain all we had was sunshine. There were 14 of us paddling tonight and after a warm-up we hit the boat and we were off. We paddled off from the dock and then practiced a few hip movements and spent some time on stroke technique. Every practice seems to be a little harder than the practice before. I struggle with the technique and lose my timing or concentrate on my timing and forget to move my hips; hopefully it will all come together before June. The coaches are very patient with us novices and keep telling us we are doing just fine. Oh I hope soon it will be the truth.

Saturday April 16, 2004 – What a big group we are on Saturdays when we have two boats warming-up together. It is amazing to meet so many wonderful people. I am continually surprised that just about everyone I meet knows someone who paddles on one of our boats. I get an all over fuzzy feeling being a part of this wonderful group. I can only imagine the feelings on race day. Whew! What a practice, we certainly worked on our stroke and as I concentrate on some of the finer points it seems to me it is getting harder and harder. Everyone in the boat is very patient with the novices and gives us lots of encouragement. We had some fun with drills and pyramids today. We paddled to Science World and back to the Bridge and then looped around again. We were asked to have an impromptu race with another boat out practicing, but thankfully our coach declined. I am certainly not ready to compete when I just barely know how to hold the paddle. See You Tuesday!

Tuesday April 20, 2004 – Tonight our practice was special; we had a guest on board with us, Ruth, our coaches' mentor. I sat in the 2nd row and had a chance to experience the front of the boat. We had a great practice and really worked on our paddling technique. I spent most of the practice on the right side tonight and it is becoming much more comfortable although I feel stronger paddling on the left but I am really glad that I have the opportunity to paddle on both sides. I must admit I let my focus stray outside the boat and now I am really intimidated. This boat went paddling by us and were they moving and the paddles were so synchronized it was really awesome to watch but also a little scary, will we ever be even close to that good? I sure hope so but they did look like they have been practicing for eons and certainly not for 3 weeks so yes I think that one day maybe we will look that strong and our boat will move that fast because we have what it takes to win, because everyone of us are already winners.

Saturday April 24, 2004 – As we gathered together for our paddle today we were introduced to some of the SALS, special ladies who have formed a support group for the paddlers. It was so nice to meet you and hopefully we will have a chance to chat at various functions when the whole group comes together. Today's practice was especially interesting I was again in the 2nd row but during the practice when we changed seats I had the opportunity to sit in row 1 and that meant being the stroke person for a brief period. Let me tell you, there are no breaks or (what was the term I heard?) lily dipping when you are the stroke person anyway it was a really good experience and I liked it. Then from the first row I moved even closer to the head of the boat and had a chance to sit in the coaches seat, facing the paddlers and that was really a different perspective of the boat it is quite

something to see everyone paddling in unison and to feel the boat surge forward with a pulse of energy Wow it is something everyone needs to feel. We also started working on power strokes today. After spending some time on the technique we also spent some time on Power which I think means speed and this is achieved by pushing the paddle deeper into the water and increasing the number of strokes in a minute. Only time will tell. So all in all it was a really interesting practice for me and I can hardly wait for Tuesday. Thanks coach.

Tuesday April 27, 2004 – ‘Blow ye winds high ho, a paddling we’ll go’ Whew did the winds blow tonight. But troopers that we are we were out there paddling. Although we didn’t really stray out of Alder Bay. I’d say this was a good thing due to the small craft warning for most areas on the water. We started our practice with a safety drill. Whether this was to build confidence or to scare the pants off us I’m not sure, but our coaches and captain wanted to make sure we would know what to do in the event the boat should be swamped and we find ourselves swimming instead of paddling. And Welcome back to some of the Cape Town Crew who joined us for this practice.

Saturday May 1, 2004 – Welcome Back! We had more of the Cape Town Crew join us for today’s practice. It was nice to have them join us. Today the water was calm again and the wind had turned into a nice gentle breeze. A far cry from the push and pull of the wind on Tuesday. Today we had our first experience with race starts, we practiced the first 6 strokes of a start, not at all what I was expecting but with practice I’m sure it will all come together. This was the last practice with help from paddlers from other boats; it was nice to meet all the ladies who came out to help when we were low on numbers. Thanks for the help and letting us novices see your technique.

Tuesday May 4, 2004 – Wow am I ever discouraged after today’s practice. It was a real work out and I felt so out of shape and out of breath. Things just didn’t seem to go smoothly and I felt like my paddle was in the boat more than it was in the water today. Then to top off my feeling of inadequacy we paddled a few seconds at race speed and my paddle hit the paddles in front and back of me more than it hit the water. I guess I’m going to have to push myself harder when I’m at the gym to build up my strength. But enough with my grouching, really it was a very good practice and Sally and Carol worked us hard because we don’t have that much more time until we have to actually paddle a race. Ohhhh scary! But the experience paddlers tried to calm some of our fears by telling us that the adrenalin really pumps at race time and makes the paddling easier. Oh I hope so. Well anyway I made it thru the practice and hopefully it will be better next practice.

Saturday May 8, 2004 – Party! Did someone say party? We had our first party of the season last night and it was a great evening with much delicious food and wine and lots of talk and laughter. We had a nice chance to catch up with and welcome back the members of our boat who have just returned from Cape Town, S. Africa. It sounds like they had a wonderful trip and once again did an awesome job of spreading the word that a full and active life continues after breast cancer. Well we’ve put another practice behind us and what a great practice it was. We spent quite a bit of time doing pyramids and it is amazing at how much longer I am able to paddle. I think I may be able to rise to the challenge of the race. Only time and many more practices will tell.

Tuesday May 11, 2004 – The practices continue to be challenging and I am really pushing myself to keep up. One thing that is special to the Tuesday evening practice is the trip to the Dockside pub afterwards. This is a special time where we can all gather and chat about the practice and just get to know the other members of the boat. The social aspect of the group is one more thing that makes this experience so enjoyable.

Sunday May 16, 2004 – What a day, this was an awesome practice and we worked really hard but the best was that all five boats came together for this practice. We worked very hard and I really gave it my all. The practice finished with a group photo on the water. After much ado about nothing we finally managed to get all six boats lined up and fanned out for what will hopefully be an unforgettable picture.

Tuesday May 18, 2004 – This was a difficult day for me, due to an injury I will have to remain on land for a few practices. I hope I will be able to paddle again this season but only time will tell and how quickly I will heal. I came to the practice and participated in the warm-up and then waved farewell to my teammates as they paddled out into Alder Bay. It was quite something though to see my boat mates paddling and how good they look. I wish them a safe and challenging evening. Hopefully I'll see you next week.

Friday May 28, 2004 – Well I have been working hard at getting better but it looks like I won't be able to paddle again this year. It is really disappointing but on the bright side my team mates have been very supportive and the coach had asked me to help our team manager. So all is not lost and I will continue to come to the Tuesday practices and will definitely be there tomorrow for the False Creek Women's Regatta.

Saturday May 29, 2004 – What a wonderful day this turned out to be. At first I was terribly disappointed that I would not be able to paddle with my team then the coach phoned and asked me to assist with the manager in getting everyone organized for each race. It was an incredible experience to watch each race and the report to the team their awesome times. It was so much fun to see everyone dressed up in their various costumes and there was a whole lot of pink around the 5 AIAB boats. We all got together for a wonderful lunch, the food was unbelievable, and it was fun to chat to women from the other boats. The day was very long and when we got to the car it felt really good to sit back and relax. I carpool with several members of the Wednesday False Creek boat so it is always interesting to hear how things went for another team. I hear that this regatta is just a small warm up for Alcan and today was so much fun I can't even begin to think what the Alcan will be like. I am really looking forward to the Alcan Festival.

Tuesday June 1, 2004 – I joined my fellow paddlers for the practice although I can no longer paddle it is nice to attend the practices it keeps me feeling like one of the team. I joined in the warm-up and went with everyone to the dock and held paddles and ropes etc as they got ready for their practice. I watched them paddle out and awhile later return. Then we all retired to the Keg for snacks and drinks. This was a fun evening as everyone from the team was there and we all had a chance to view several photos from the regatta. Although paddling is the main reason we come together there is really so much more to the group I feel a very special bond with my team mates.

Tuesday June 15, 2004 – Wow what a practice. I went in the boat for this our last practice together as a team. It was very special to me as I will not be able to actually experience a race this year but while out for our practice tonight the team went thru a mock race actually 2 mock races. It was really something special to see everyone pulling together and it felt like we were flying over the water, and to feel a race start was thrilling. Now I feel like I can sort of imagine what it feels like in the boat during a race. All the more reason for me to get past my injury and make sure I am in tip top shape for next year. Tonight after our time on the water we had a lot of fun eating and partying at the pub and then we had a meeting with our coaches advising all we need to do for the Alcan. It really sounds like this is going to be a busy hectic weekend but fun fun fun. I am looking forward to my role as team manager for the festival.