

## Diary of a Novice Paddler 2004

Donna Bell paddles with *Amazons Abreast*, the Wednesday False Creek boat.



### The week of May 24th – Life with Amazons Abreast.

**Wednesday evening** – This week with my team began with another beautiful sunny warm Wednesday evening practice. As our energetic and talented Juanita warmed us up on the grass, we moved every which way, grinning from ear to ear. And as we did this, I noticed that people walking by would stop, looking on with great interest and a smile would come to their face, because we were looking “so good” in our hot pink shirts and having just so much fun.

Then off we trotted to our boat – oh, oh, not just any boat, but “the boat”, the new hot shot Gemini. In we got and the experience began. My partner in crime, Heather and I were to be “strokes” this evening and the fun began. We sat down and knew we were in for a treat. First, our butts barely fit on the seat (not that I am implying we have big butts, but really now, who are these seats made for!). And leg room – what was that! And so it continued – the boat was “tippy”, “how do you leg drive in this thing”, paddles were intersecting with each other more than usual, and our timing was rather “out” at times. but we persevered. Our motivating coaches, Juanita and Lita kept encouraging us, we made it back to shore, quite thankfully, and my butt never forgave me for at least 2 days.

**Saturday morning** – It’s Saturday morning, May 29th, the morning of the False Creek Regatta and after going to the bathroom for the 100th time, I finally made it out the door, loaded down with all of my paddling paraphernalia.

When I arrived it was quite a sight! People everywhere, dressed in costumes that were very creative and loud. And not to be outdone, there were the gals in pink! From pink hair (Susan D – your quite a fox as a pink head), pink lipstick, pink cheeks, pink nails, pink sarongs, pink grass skirts, pink shoes, pink toe nails (Carol has quite the set of toe nails – very sheik), pink arrows (we’re Amazons you know), pink art work (compliments of Susan D), pink flowers – PINK, PINK, PINK – it was a Pink Fest! There we were, Abreast In A Boat teams, all together. putting up tents, filling the food table with endless goodies. The energy was contagious!

And then it was almost time for our first race – GULP – after going to the bathroom – AGAIN – we grooved and moved to the beat of Juanita and then began our staging process. Oh boy, what a sight! The energy could have lit up New York City and the camaraderie, everyone was wishing each other a good race, teams were sharing their team chants, family and friends were there cheering and supporting. It was awesome!

And then, HARK, we hear “Amazons Abreast” – come on down! Down the ramp we trotted into our boat, assisted by wonderful volunteers, funny and very encouraging. Now we’re in the boat. “Focus ladies” – we’re all connected, it’s just us out here – we’re getting prepared. As we quietly paddled towards the starting line, we position ourselves under the skilled paddle of our Steers Person, Jean...we hold the boat...focus...focus. I remember hearing some starting commands and “boom” we’re off! Each one of us paddling our hearts out, paddling to the beat of the drum, ‘STROKE, STROKE, HIT, HIT, LEAN OUT, PADDLES DEEP, POWER IT NOW – well not quite in that order, but we did it! 500 meters!!!

I have to say that I almost shared my breakfast with my team, if you know what I mean, but it was awesome! What an exhilarating experienced – I’m hooked! We raced 2 more times and our times got better each time – what a team!

There were many highlights of the day, but to name a few – Juanita and what she can do with a pink “boa”, “ Jean, Jean the dancing machine”, Joyce – our girl Friday, always prepared with everything we might need, including a full size mirror, a decedent Starbucks Mocha with Dianne, posing for pictures with my novice pals, Shirley, Joann and Debbie. All of us sharing stories, sharing laughs, sharing tears.

It was a day I will always remember – in fact every time I am with this wonderful group of women, I feel more blessed. For their friendship, for their laughter and for their courage. So on to next week for more practices, more laugh, more aches and pains and look out Alcan, cause here we come!

Paddles up!

Proud to be an Amazon. . .

Donna “Taz” Bell