

## Diary of a Novice Paddler 2006 – Colleen Wong

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**April 5/06 Wed.** The first paddle was fun! The sun was shining and water was calm when we cautiously clambered into the boat. Where do I put my feet? I felt awkward. One foot braced against seat in front of me the other moved now and again. We learned boat commands. HOLD was most important—coach repeated this one a few times. Hip against the gunwale. Paddle parallel, arms extend fully for each stroke, etc. (I can't remember the rest). I'll have to listen up for these terms at the next practice. I knocked paddles and splashed and was splashed with water. The boat moved and I felt at peace and saw beauty (very scenic) on the water. Then it was over too soon. I could have help the paddle up in ready position for a lot longer. I was still energetic (a great

change from last year when I couldn't find my energy). All that aerobic and weight training is paying off. I'm grateful for this experience and the support and enthusiasm of Abreast In A Boat (coaches, trainers, manager, veterans, hangers on, etc.) We met at noisy Cat's Meow after practice for food and drink (long, long, long table). Susan distributed AIAB baseball caps to us novices.

**April 7/06 Saturday morning.** Had a surprise group picture taken under pink cherry blossoms. Weather was cool, calm, and overcast. We started with paddling tips from coach Don on land. Hold paddle up, body position, reach, bum movement, etc. We carefully clambered onto the skinny dragonboat (Gemini). Most of us liked the roomier 6/16 that we paddled in on Wed. We did stroking exercises and pause drill. We can manage to do 5 perfect strokes at the start before getting out of sync. We paddled more today than on our first day—I felt this was better workout and we stretched a lot on the boat too. Melody was on my left and we were in the middle of the boat.

**April 12/06 Wed. 5:30pm** We're starting to know each other's names and faces. The ground was drier for our warm-up exercises led by Joanne with the experienced Abreast in a Boat False Creek crew. We started late because there was a mix up with the boats, so we had to get another 6/16 from the dock. Coach Don went over paddles up position and Carol and Diana checked out each of us in that position on land. We had 3 coaches today. 20 paddlers (18 novices, Carol & Jane). Judi steering and Don drumming. Diana kayaking beside us coached from her on the water vantage point. Jane and Carol helped to check our postures on the boat. Diana wanted to see my backside facing the water. Great effort is being made so that we look like we know how to paddle. Looking good is important says coach Don. We did more paddling drills; fronts and backs, evens and odds, seats 1,2,3 then 4,5,6 then 7,8,9,10. We paddle 10 easy and 10 hard. We did a 2 minute paddle. There was a cool wind so we paddled to move and keep warm. When we were catching all together the boat moved swiftly. We did some strokes with our eyes closed to feel the boat's movement on the water. Then we paddled back to dock and put our paddles and life jackets back in the shed until next Wed. Tina & Diana reminded everyone to do our

weights and aerobic workouts. We don't practice Sat. because of Easter break, so I'll do my workout to stay fit to paddle (as Diana has said to us). Melody was on my right and we were seat 9 today.

**April 19/06 Wed.** Got to Granville Island at 5:10pm, found parking and empty locker. Our manager Susan gave us our fuchsia T-shirts which we are to wear to all practices, races and events. I wore an extra layer of clothing because of the cool weather and gray skies. The warm up exercises led by Joanne made me hot—overdressed. Coach Don explained “rotation” and “reach”. Paddles up. Rotation (backside faces outside of boat) then “reach” top arm out atop paddle poised straight one inch above the water. We sat on 5 front seats, left 1 seat empty, and sat on back 5 seats today. We paddled for 2 minute intervals. We did a “start” drill ‘cos another crew asked “Want a race?” What’s a start? 6 strokes then 3 sets of 10 hard paddles in a row. We beat the other boat even though we had 3 different stroke rates on our boat because we had more perfect strokes than the other boat. That was fun. I saw my ol’ pharmacy lab instructor (now assistant dean) paddling on another boat—we said hello. We did sequences. Seats 1&2, then 3&4, 5&6, 7&8, 9&10 did 10 hard paddles each for 3 cycles. Melody and Lynn were strokes today. I sat behind Lynn and didn't knock paddles today. Judi steered and Carol was with us in the back too. I got more wet today. Louise was on my left in seat 2. We did stretching between hard paddles. Boat was jerking a bit. Raining a bit, but peaceful on water.

**April 22/06 Sat.** sunny and warm. Made a few trips to locker room to peel off extra layer of clothes and to fetch gloves. Went to help get the Gemini. Saw how very long steering oar is for first time. Got back for end of warm up stretches. I'm still coughing (from dry throat?) We did start drills. Some new faces at practice today. Don steered and coached from back. Carol coached from the front end. We had trouble getting started. Paddles were knocking paddles and bodies. I had trouble finding where to put my feet in this boat. I was uncomfortable in the middle of the boat. It was a beautiful day and we saw one seal in the creek. Drank all my water. The hard paddling was more fun—duration too short. I helped return the boat at end of practice. Must remember to rotate, didn't feel comfortable reaching today. I think we should review paddles up, rotate and reach before each practice.

**April 26/06 Wed.** Weather was cloudy. It rained a little during paddle. Our manager Susan was coaching us to hold paddle lower and stroke in a “D” pattern. This info helped me lots. Drills were front, and middle, and back; front and back, starts, and 2 minute paddles. I had a good workout. We did stretches and leaned out for swan dives. Judi steered us well and noticed that we are still looking at our paddles instead of across the boat at the front stroke. I had enough energy to help paddle the boat back before going home.

**April 29/06 Sat.** Our first paddle in the rain. It wasn't raining when I walked to Granville Island at 9am. 6 of us went with manager Susan to fetch the boat. We missed the warm up exercises led by Carol. (Joanne and her crew weren't there today). Jane was our able coach today. We took a while to get our left and right line up together when the rain started. I was in seat 8 with Pam on my right. Susan and Carol were in front of us—I was looking forward to following experienced paddlers. Lynn and Jeanette were behind. We practiced start drills (6, 10, then lots of quick strokes...). There were a few times when we

all hit the water together and the boat shot smoothly forward. With Judy steering and Jane up front and Susan and Carol all reminding us to look up to the front of the boat at the person(s) on the opposite side. I saw Janet's pink gloved hand in seat 3 or 4 going up and did my best to have my arm up when she did. The strokes at front did a good job of keeping time to Jane's "drumming". The rain was pouring down on us. We were very, very wet, cold and damp. My waterproof pants and jacket were drenched but underneath I was mostly dry. The black baseball cap was dripping. I could open my mouth and get a mouthful of rainwater easily. We did some stretching under the bridge which offered some shelter from the rain. The other dragon boats also parked under the bridge for some of their drills. We did more endurance paddling on our way back to the dock. The paddling kept me warm, but I was tired at the end of today's paddle. I couldn't wait to get out the boat and my wet clothes. The equipment room was locked so we couldn't put away our life jackets and paddles so they were piled up outside in the rain. Sheila gave me a ride home and I washed up, changed, got warm, ate lunch and am looking forward to our next paddle. I'll be away for next 2 practices, and hope the sun is shining for everyone when we meet again.

**May 10/06 Wed.** Sunny, warm evening. First paddle after vacation. I was at back of boat with Tina. Fortunately we were slimmer, but very tight fit—cramped. Forced to shove hip against side of boat. I was on the right with Carol in front of me. Judi steering behind. Advantage of being in the back is can let paddle drag back and no one knocks into you. After practice I went to change and walked into fascinating locker-room conversation on pasties and reconstruction. Turns out we have the same plastic surgeon. We compared experiences with mastectomies and reconstruction. I saw a beautiful tram flap reconstruction and realistic nipples by a tattoo artist. Another showed how her saline implants dimple. I had a silicone gel implant which I didn't show with the big scars on my chest. One crew member considering delayed reconstruction noted the smorgasbord of choices was overwhelming. There is no one right choice, and even now I don't know if I made the right one. On the way to my car, I saw Lynn who was going to the Keg to meet other paddlers. I was very thirsty since I forgot my water bottle today so I went with her for a beer. Carol, Jane, Maryann and Laurie were at the Keg too. Carol shared her amusing story about the plaster nipple casts they used to make for reconstruction patients. All together an informative, enjoyable evening.

**May 15/06 Mon.** warm evening. Make-up practice for Sat. Coach Diana on water in her kayak. Jane coached from front. I was on right side on seat 8 beside Janet B. Lynn in front and Dolores behind. Diana's great on the water vantage point and coaching helped improve our strokes.

**May 17/06 Wed.** sunny and warm in 6/16 Susan steering. Jane coaching and drumming. Don on water in kayak. Margaret couldn't paddle on right so had to switch and paddle right side again. Remember to warn everyone to stabilize boat before standing up. More drills to get ready to race. No practice on Victoria Day weekend.

**May 24/06 Wed.** cloudy. Our last practice before Women's Regatta. Judi steered. I was on seat 8 with Janet B. Don coaching from kayak told me to throw my left shoulder forward. This worked and I could feel the blade pulling through the water. Lynn wasn't here today

with safety kit. Susan had to hop out of boat to get extra paddle and PFD. I paddled behind Susan today, which I enjoyed very much. We practiced starts against other crews twice tonight. My brother was steering one of the competitor boats. Practice was very short tonight because we took a long time getting on to the water. We only went once around the creek. Don spoke of trying to get boat earlier so we can spend more time paddling during our slotted on water time instead of on shore.

**May 27/06 Sat. Race Day.** Cloudy. Dropped Elissa off at her Aunt & Uncle's at 7:30am Nora was at Easy Park with parking passes. A few of us arrived at 7:45am and walked together to the site. Tents were being set up. Laurie pointed out where AIAB crews were meeting. The other 5 crews on our team provided a tentful of healthy fruit, snacks, nuts, sandwiches, salads, and sweet treats. Water and juices too. Cups, plates, napkins, cutlery. Lots to eat and drink and pretty flowers to decorate each table. Pink and fuchsia all around. Very thoughtful. We helped set up the merchandise tent. We mustered in front of the green building at Dragon Zone. Don talked about procedure and strategy. Diana, Don, Carol, Susan, Brenda, Cheryl, and Lynn cheered us on from the shore. We were in the first race at 9am. We lined up with the other 3 teams. The teams were introduced and did their team chants (we didn't have one as we didn't know this was coming). Then we filed over to pick up PFD and paddle before going down to boat. We clambered on the Gemini. Jane and Judi had us practice a start on our way to the start line. We were slow to get to the start line and when we got there the starter said "GO!" It was sudden and unexpectedly fast. We came 4th but 1st in our lane. We heard cheers from our fuchsia supporters. We completed our first race—hurray! We met in front of gazebo for post-race debriefing. Susan gave us each a pink bracelet to commemorate our 1st race. We weren't ready for start—not our best start. Our timing was good though. We warmed up before each race led by Carol or Joanne. Our next race at 11:20 we did better (starting well), and our third race was even better. We were faster each time. The coaches shuffled our seating for each race. In between races, we snacked and chatted and watched other races and cheered and visited the rest of the site. There were some really creative, fun and outlandish costumes. We had an Abreast Oar Knot crew photo after our third and last race at 1:30pm. We had the team photo with all 6 Abreast in A Boat crews at 4pm and then went home. Tents were taken down quickly and efficiently. My right arm was tired and wet.

**May 31/06 Wed.** Cloudy, some rain. Wet and warm on the water. Judi steered. Susan coached. Jane had bronchitis and had to leave after she put us in order. Don & Diana out of town at a conference. Susan distributed our new paddles before practice. They came individually wrapped in plastic and smelled of new wood. Today we worked on stamina, endurance and timing. We reviewed reach and rotation with hand in the water and other hand behind back. I was on right side of seat 7 again. Sheila beside me. Maryanne behind and Melody in front. Susan brought chocolates from the False Creek Women for being in their Women's Regatta on Sat. & Dolores brought chocolate covered macadamia nuts for a nice on-the-boat treat. All were yummy—thanks. Susan said our timing was good today. Practice was over too soon again. Happy Birthday Janet P. Lynn gave us each a CD-ROM copy of the photos she had taken of the Women's regatta. So thoughtful and kind. Jane had us sign a card for the new Abreast team in Italy. Susan led us to do stretches during our paddle and on land under the trees afterwards. There was talk of Australia in

September 2007. Too far ahead to plan but I'd like to go. Susan gave us homework—learn words to paddling song for next Sat. practice !

**June 3/06 Sat. 9:12am** lots of parking at Granville Island. Cloudy but shifting weather, so was sunny at end of practice. We didn't sing song 'cos best singer was already out on the water with the other Abreast On The Creek crew. Susan was there early with paperwork for other regattas. Jane had plumbing emergency so she couldn't be with us. Carol and Susan led short warm up. Carol coached us in drummer's spot. Judi steered and assisted. Don coached from kayak beside us. We saw the other crew in a beautiful blue dragon shaped boat. We were in a refitted Gemini. I was in seat 6 with Janet B. on my right. Louise was in front of me, then switched with Melody for last part of practice. Lisa was behind me and then she switched places with me. Lots of splashing today. I chose not to wear my rain jacket and pants because I was warm so my left side and pants were soaked at end of practice. Forgot my compression sleeve at home. Tina had some tendonitis in her arm from last practice. Don coached us to paddle hard but pull paddle in and rest when tired. Today we worked on intensity. We did 5 sets each of 15 second hard paddling and 45 seconds easy then 30 seconds hard and easy then 1 minute hard. We practiced 10 stroke pause drills. We did stretches on the boat. We finished with a couple of 2 minute paddles. I pulled my paddle in at least a couple of times during this practice. I'm still not reaching consistently...have to work on throwing my outside shoulder forward to reach. Carol taught us to do the 1.Thump Thump paddle 2.Paddle over head 3.Reach & Rotate (Pull) 4.Recovery and repeat on our way back to dock. Had enough energy to help return the boat. Dropped off PFD in FCC shed and went to shop for lunch at the market. I hope I'm not stiff and sore tomorrow. Only 3 more practices left—wish there were more.

**June 8/06 Wed.** Sunny and warm evening. See only Abreast On The Creek crew and Lynn. Other Oar Knots start arriving near the playground. Susan distributed crew Alcan passes to Oar Knots. Pictures of both crews together were taken under the trees. All the coaches were with us today. Don & Diana on kayaks. Jane in drummer's seat, Judi steering. Susan & Carol paddled at back of 6/16. I was in front for a change in seat 3 with Sheila on my left. Laurie was in front of me and Pam behind me. We practiced 10 strokes perfect paddle pause drill. Diana "cracked the whip" shouting out directions to each of us in turn. We practiced starts and hard paddling for 100 m, then start and hard paddling for 200 m, then hard paddling for 300 m—it was very hard and tiring. We finished with hard paddling for 500 m and I found that was not so hard. We worked on timing to paddle in sync. Laurie brought much appreciated snack (gummies). Jane led us to do stretches on the boat. We paddled easy back to dock and did the "salute" (thump, thump, paddle up, reach, pull, pull). We met up with the other crew at Carousel Theatre for beer & pizza social hosted by Abreast On The Creek. I ate & chatted with many of these nice women and a good time was had by all. Glenda (the organizer) kindly gave us each a pocket size laminated copy to the paddling song so we could sing along and learn it more easily. We sang the song and felt the warmth of good company.

**June 10/06 Sat. 9:30am** Cloudy, Hot, Muggy morning. I went to help get the Gemini. I had my raingear on and stripped most of it off before paddling. We were back in time for part of warm up with Joanne. 24 Oar Knots today so Yme & Margaret paddled with Abreast On The Creek crew. Short talk and we boarded our boat before the other crew today. I was in

seat 4 with Anne D. Pam in front and Maryanne behind me. Lots of splashing so I was glad my plastic pants were on. We practiced easy paddling with eyes closed. We did seat drills (1,2 then 3,4 then 5,6 then 7,8 then 9,10 and variations 9,10 & 5,6 or 1,2,3,4 etc. We worked on starts. Jane tried to clarify “fluffy” and explain the transition. Hear “GO!” Do 6 hard strokes then 10 fluffy then 3,2,1 (transition) Reach and Dig, racing pace. We were out of sync practicing the “salute” back to the dock. We’re working on a lot of stuff. After returning PFD to shed, we met at Nora’s car for Easy Park tokens for Alcan Sat & Sun. Really appreciate Nora organizing this for us. Laurie discussed June 28 after-season social which Nora kindly volunteered to host at her home. Anne T was selling AIAB merchandise from her car in the parking lot after practice. Only one practice left and then Alcan and our social. I think we are just getting to know each other (used to seeing each other regularly) and liking this ritual a lot. Like a new touchstone. Something fun to look forward to regularly. Connecting experience.

**June 14/06 Wed.** Clear, overcast, warm evening. Susan was in the community centre lounge with paperwork for Victoria. Cheryl was there too with info on accommodations for Aug. regatta in Victoria and dinner with the Governor General. We started off with lots questions and answers about Alcan, Australia, Victoria, AIAB, etc.

Jane told us more about the history of AIAB. We were late getting on the water, but that was OK ‘cos coaches wanted us to be rested (injury free) for Alcan on Sat. Don coached from kayak. Jane was coaching from drummer’s seat. Judi steered and Susan paddled in back. There were enough novices that Carol stayed on shore and didn’t paddle with us. I was in front (seat 4?) on right side again (still working on getting stroke correct for Alcan). Without a warm-up paddle, we pretended we were getting into boat for our first race. Paddled out to get in a start position, did our start and paddled hard for 500 m to finish. We rested and did another start against a boat Kerry was drumming and coaching. We did front then back alternating for 10 hard strokes to get back to dock. We saw Carol walking along False Creek. Jane called out for us to do the “salute” as we paddled by Carol. We’re still working on timing for the salute. Our last practice was a short one.

**June 17/06 Sat.** Started out cloudy, then very warm and sunny, then windy, rainy and cold. Arrived on site at 8am. Found our tent #124 with the other AIAB crews beside us. We set up chairs on gravelly ground and put down our back tent flap. Excitement, anticipation, comraderie, new experience for us novices. Some went for coffee, others to look around, others just slowly arriving. We mustered on the grass behind the green building at 9am. Diana & Susan were there. Don gave us a run down of what to expect before the race.

Carol led our warm up and asked us to unload fanny packs, etc to lighten the boat. We raced in 6/16 at about 10:34am. I was on right side, seat 3 with Pam in front and Melody behind me. We paddled well. Jane shouted encouragingly. We finished in under 3 minutes (wow!). I saw my daughter and Sue waving from outside Science World—and all the other support around me and my team. Very heartwarming. There was an AIAB crew arch of paddles to cheer us after our first race. We finished first in our lane #1. We were quite pleased with ourselves—we finished the paddle pretty gracefully with intensity in public. We did it as a team together! As Louise led us to cheer before the race, “Abreast Oar Knot is A O K! Paddles up and we’re away!”

We enjoyed our AIAB provided bagged lunch of tuna, chicken or cucumber bun and orange and juice box and water bottles.

Our second race was at 2:35pm in a gemini. Water was rough and we struggled. Just as the race finished, the rain began to pour and I got more wet in the rain than in the dragonboat. I packed up stuff and met up with my daughter and my friend Maria. We played in Science World 'til 5pm when the rain stopped.

**June 18/06 Sun.** Woke up 6am. Up early to pack food and get ready for the races. Picked up Maria and parked at Easy Park at 7:50am. We went to meeting place at 8am. Elissa & I waved to my brother Darby getting into safety boat with his megaphone (Alcan volunteers keep long hours over this weekend). Jane drummed and yelled encouragement to us for all our races and Judi steered us straight. I thought 9:20am race was our last race, so really pulled paddle hard with the rest of my team. I feel this was our best race. We surprised ourselves by beating another team and getting into recreational consolation race at 12:35pm.

Don and Susan were doing double duty this weekend steering the Children's Hospital team and the MS team respectively as well as helping Abreast Oar Knot team. Perfect sunny and warm day. Juanita from the Langley FORT-itude team led warm-up exercises with great positive volume and energy in the afternoon. The Scotiabank race for the 5 AIAB and 1 Wasabi team happened at 3:20pm. Diana distributed a pink carnation to each team member for the flower ceremony just before the race.

I didn't have as much energy and focus as I did in the morning, but we finished first in our lane! We all paddled back to water near dock.

Words were spoken and carnations were strewn into the water in memory of all who have had breast cancer. When we came ashore, Elissa was waiting for me with pink carnation and hugs. We went under the longest arch of paddles and supporters patting our backs, shaking hands and high fives. The other AIAB crew members congratulating us.

We were novices no more. We had completed our first Alcan dragonboat races. This has been a treat of a day. We started well in most of our races and improved our best times regularly. I was in seat 4 with Yme (the one with great reach and rotation). Pam was in front of me and Maryanne behind.

Karen and Nora were our strokes most of the weekend. I felt my paddle pulling water and my arms and calves were a bit sore but I felt happy. We are all moving ahead, progressing, continuing with life. Breasts or no breast we are healing and having fun. Abreast in a Boat has made a positive difference in my life. Abreast Oar Knot is A O K. Thanks to all my team (a great group of strong, able women of different ages and diverse backgrounds at different stages of life). We practiced, splashed, gabbed, and had fun becoming a team. I enjoyed being in the same boat and will miss our Wed. and Sat. paddles together. Thanks also to our coaches, Don, Diana, Carol, Jane, Susan, Judi who helped make this novice adventure possible.