

Diary of a Novice Paddler 2008 – Judi Clark

#1: Pre-season Prep:



When the going gets tough...go shopping.

My friends have recommended a paddling jacket that covers the butt and that MEC is a good place to look. A shopaholic, I very rarely feel overwhelmed when in a store, but walking into MEC was a close call.

Starting in the paddling section (which seemed a logical choice) was a bad idea. The jacket on sale and the least expensive was \$299.00. Oh My!!! Fortunately, a very helpful sales clerk directed me to the women's section. Here I could find a jacket that although not designed to protect me from hypothermia should I go overboard in the middle of the ocean, would be more than sufficient for spring

workouts. Note to self: do everything to avoid deep cold water dips.

The real deal though were water resistant pants I found at the Bay. Forty % off the last sale price – I think they paid me to take them out of the store. Shopping tales probably seem trite, but it's much easier to understand than the reality of the adventure I am about to begin.

#2: Six weeks to season start:

OH NO! Patricia and I went to the gym yesterday. I don't know how she feels today but my arms and shoulders have a few things to say! At the same time though I am really looking forward to the next few weeks and training my body for this new challenge.

#3: Our first crew meeting – February 25, 2008

Words fail as I walk into Orrie's home and see the women with whom I have so many experiences in common. Everyone is happy and excited, looking forward to the paddling season. At the same time however, I can't help but feel some poignant moments as I realize what has brought us all together.

Being the women we are there is a ton of food and of course ample kool-aid. The meeting begins and we work through the tasks of organizing our crew and figuring out who will do what. I keep repeating people's names in my mind, but who am I kidding! If I know my own name by the end of the evening with all the new info we are getting, I'll be happy.

Orrie models the two different paddles, wooden and the other black one. It seems most prefer the lighter other one, but apparently wooden is better for newbies. Given my gym experience, I personally think light is good but will go with the advice of the wiser more experienced among us.

As the evening draws to a close, I am still very much in awe of what it means to be here with these women. I am in awe of the time and commitment they give to this organization, the support to one another and that we are here. A mentor of mine from a previous career as family therapist, once said of trauma survivors, first we are victims, then we are survivors and then we are warriors. With these women around me, I feel like I am entering the warrior phase.

#4: March 20 2008 Dancing with the Stars or I didn't know counting to four could be so difficult!

It's 2 pm Thursday and 10 others from this crazy Barnet Crew have gathered for a lesson in Salsa dancing. Rosita, another new crew member and our fearless instructor convinced us it would be great exercise and fun to boot. I am learning this is a crew that really likes to have fun. I'm not sure, but I think Rosita is learning we may be a group for whom adaptations are necessary.

We start with the Meringay (if I can't dance it, you can't expect me to spell it.) It is the easiest apparently, but even as I write this a just few hours later, I don't know how to outline the steps. I know we counted to four, and that women always step forward with the left foot, or was that the right? We start forward with one of our feet and I stared at my feet for the whole time so you think I would remember with which I started. We meringayed, Cha Cha'd, Tangoed and Rumba'd. We laughed and we glowed because of course we don't sweat.

Rosita, you were wonderful and I can't wait until next Thursday. I do hope however, I am better able to synchronize my arms in paddling with the beat of the drummer than I have so far been able to coordinate my feet. Paddles Up.

#5: Saturday March 29, 2008

I listened horrified to each and every weather forecast for the day. Who would have thought our first paddling day would be preceded by two days of hail and snow -at the end of March yet! However, we arrived at Barnet and although cold there was some sun in the sky. Did I mention cold?

After some brief business stuff and a warm up led by yours truly, we each took a place at the side of the boat to carry it down to the water. The style of stroke we will be using this year is different than in previous years and Brenda and Orrie worked so hard to clearly demonstrate it in a dry land lesson. Certainly, my ability (or more aptly, lack thereof) is no reflection on their efforts. I thought I had it mastered, until I got into the boat.

Moving the Doriana into the water is a bit of an effort, but I think we were all so excited to get our feet wet, which we really did, that it was all part of the fun. We were soon all aboard, novices matched with more experienced paddlers and ready to begin.

To say it was all easy and went smoothly would be a lie. I truly am a slow learner, to which the paddler sitting behind me could easily attest. I splashed her so many times, you'd have thought I was in a water fight. There were times during the drills when I was so out of sync I despaired of being allowed back next Saturday. But then there were the voices of the

coaches and team captain and other more experienced paddlers, saying you're really getting it; you're doing so well; you can do this. And because they also offered very specific and helpful advice, I almost believe I just may be able to do this. I will work at not bobbing, at keeping both hands over the side of the boat and keeping the paddle at 45 degrees (and not splashing everyone around me, I promise!)

Physically, I found paddling demanding but it may have been less so if I had followed the training program. I know at one point in the practice, I yelled back at Patricia, we should have gone to the gym! The day after, my shoulders were sore, my legs were sore – I don't quite have that bracing thing down yet, and my butt -oh so sore.

Emotionally and spiritually, it was an incredibly uplifting experience. Being out on the water, the eagles, this group of women, and of course, the Dorian – I am so looking forward to Wednesday and our next paddling session.

#6: **Wednesday, April 2nd**

Our warm-up Wednesday night was a spicy treat of Salsa dancing led by Rosa. As we concentrated and enjoyed ourselves, we sometimes laughed at ourselves as we readied to move our energies to paddling. I was a bit concerned at first when there was a suggestion we might not have enough people to go out on the water. However people rushed in from work and we were going on the water!

Another amazing experience – I knew I would find it difficult to put into words, I just didn't realize how much. The drills our coaches put us through were demanding and their support and individual attention to our needs seemed unending. We would paddle intensely for a minute (I think I will do a check on Brenda Tierney's watch – it seemed longer than one minute) and then let it run. We practiced the zig-zag drill. Figuring out who was a zig or a zag took a couple of minutes and it's amazing to me how those minutes of "rest" seem to fly by. We all worked to perfect this new stroke and Orrie, Brenda and Deb were so conscientious about moving up and down the boat giving instruction and support. They were so focused on us that at one point, I thought we might lose Deb overboard after a whack in the nose from someone whose name won't be mentioned because we all know how terrible Orrie felt afterwards.

Diane, my seating partner and I switched sides about half way through practice. I like the idea of moving from one side to the other during the practice and bracing with my left foot was much easier than my previous experience. Apparently, I am not bobbing as much, but am now so bent over my posture is threatening serious back pain. I'm not sure I would have noticed that night. It was incredibly beautiful, the water was calm, the setting sun warm on our backs and faces. As I looked around at my crew-mates, I realized that despite having been quite physically active in my adult life, this is the first team sport in which I have participated. I love it! We won't mention the cold soup waiting for us after practice because I plugged the crock pot into a non working outlet. It's a lovely clubhouse with just a few eccentricities.

#7: **Saturday, April 5th**

By Saturday, Deb's nose was looking much straighter and there was no evidence of a black eye. Who said paddling wasn't a contact sport? The day unfortunately was not looking as good. The sky was overcast and there was a definite threat of rain. After our warm up we trundled the Doriana down to the beach. I know the more experienced Barnet crew would like an easier system, but right now for me, as a novice, I'm enjoying the experience of us all walking her to the water. It seems part of an important ritual in being together. It's like when the dishwasher breaks and everyone gets together to wash and dry and chit chat.

It was especially easy moving the boat today because there were so many more people and some new faces. Once in the water, our coaches put us through our paces. They seem to have a never-ending variety of drills, but this is not a complaint because while we are working hard, we are keeping warm! Sometimes I'd look up at Brenda and couldn't imagine how cold she must get on days like this when the only movement she makes is to go back and forth along the boat helping us to perfect our stroke. Unless threatening us with the torture tube (I don't even want to know), she is always smiling and encouraging.

Lynn, our steersperson in training also had what I imagine can't have been easy tasks and completed them without me even knowing she was doing the steering. She had us turning and docking and pushing away very smoothly. Thanks Lynn.

My seating partner and I changed sides again, but for some reason, this time I had trouble comfortably bracing with my left foot. I don't know if it's because I was seated in a different location in the boat or what. Hmm?

Bringing the Doriana up on the beach at the end of practice proved more difficult this time too. The tide had gone out and some rocks added some challenges. Note to self, when moving the boat up the beach, watch everyone else and do not try to move 850 some odd pounds by oneself. Sunday would definitely be a bad back day. It seems it's not only in paddling that I need to get my timing in synch with everyone else. 😞

#8: **Wednesday April 9, 2008**

Another beautiful night to be out paddling! The water was clear and the surface like glass. Barney the harbour seal made his first appearance of the year and appeared curious but didn't approach the boat. Smart seal, we would have had him towing us especially after the 250 m. sprints. This was our first time at setting a distance to "race" and it was quite exhilarating. We must be improving because it's the first time out that Deb hasn't mentioned how well we do when we go backwards. It's hard to believe that in only two weeks we'll compete in our first regatta, "The Dash for Charity," in Deep Cove.

When I think of the intensity with which we paddle (even though in short bursts) juxtaposed with the calm, peaceful and amazingly beautiful environment where we are paddling, I can't help but be struck by the two very different but complementary energies of which we are a part. It is truly awesome!

And then of course, there is the humour. We learned about "granny pants" and who wears them and which team apparently doesn't wear underwear. We were also talking about the grips on our paddles and how one of our crew needed something bigger to fill her hand because it (her hand) would slide up and down on the shaft. I think you had to be there.

#9: Saturday April 12, 2008

Paddling in shirt sleeves, it was a great day. I sat at the back of the boat and what a difference in paddling. The water goes by so much faster, consequently the stroke I think is shorter, necessitating a much quicker return. We should all still be in synch but it certainly feels different and faster.

Completing a variety of drills again we worked our way further out of our little section where we have previously paddled. Deb assured us we weren't leaving the country but just heading in the general direction of Deep Cove. Once out, we met our sisters, the North Shore Dragon Busters also practicing and drew alongside to chat. They were enjoying the day as much as we were. Many of the women know each other and the feeling of camaraderie and positive regard with which each seem to view the other was so inspiring.

A new drill today was to practice 'starts.' I had no idea there was this different component to paddling, the purpose of which is to get the boat up on plane and thus off to a powerful start. The sense of power as the boat moved through the water was amazing, as was the exhaustion after. Orrie suggested using a growl when into the intensity of the stroke to ensure we keep breathing and although she didn't say this I think it would be motivating as well. It reminded me of the final stages of birthing my kids, when you bear down, push and usually had some kind of guttural sound to make. The effort is huge and the result – wonderful.

With Orrie and Dorothy behind me and Bunny in front, birthing this new skill will hopefully be as successful.

Amelia Earhart said, "Adventure is worthwhile in itself." Today I tried steering. With steersperson Carol's assistance, we both managed to stay aboard. Standing, trying to remember which way to push or pull and at the same time keeping my balance when in the wake of other boats was quite interesting (a nice word for really #%* scary). I was completely intimidated by the responsibility the steersperson has for the safety of the crew. I am so impressed that Lynne, another novice, is learning this skill and making it seem so effortless. Carol mentioned that when she started, she had no instruction and just had to figure it out. Clearly Amelia, Carol and Lynne have a lot in common.

#10: Wednesday, April 16th

In spite of looking like it might be a chilly night to paddle, we were working so hard that I got quite warm. Once again the water was calm. We continued to work on hinging and keeping our bottom arm straight. Brenda brought the dreaded torture tubes – pieces of PVC to put over our arms in an effort to help us keep our elbows straight. It certainly accomplishes that, I'm just not sure if I'm exiting my paddle correctly.

Diane and I have both decided that we need hip replacements if we are to paddle on the side of the boat where we demonstrate our best form. For some reason, although our upper body performs better, our lower body is not happy. Laura (a former rehab nurse) informed us however that it is not our hips that are the problem. It is a ligament in our butt. Who knew that sitting could be such a pain in the ass.

I love practicing the starts! It is so intense and for me, requires a real inward focus as well as maintaining an awareness of the rest of the crew. As mentioned last time, it is really

digging deep that produces the power to get us up and forward. It is very cool to do something that requires such physical strength after everything our bodies have been through.

As always, we had wonderful food and other liquid nourishment awaiting us after our session. We're looking forward to paddling Sunday instead of Saturday and meeting with Kamini, our guest coach.

#11: **Sunday, April 20th**

Sunday was sunny, cold and windy. It had snowed the previous night, (who worries about global warming when you have snow in the middle of April!!!) and the boat had a lot of water in it. That should have been an indication of what was to come.

The waves were rolling into the beach at quite a pace and it was a real challenge to get the Doriana into the water. Our guest coach hadn't arrived and we were already tiring from trying to hold the Doriana steady (well one of us was anyway.) Dorothy was knocked into the water but in her good hearted manner noted that this is after all a water sport. Lynne had had to jump into the water to get the boat back to shore and must have been freezing, but you'd never have known from her attitude and laughter. It made the water that filled my boots a small inconvenience.

Just after we had got the boat out of the water and decided we wouldn't continue with the practice, Kamini arrived. She had other ideas and because we knew we would benefit from what she had to offer and because we are also probably slightly crazy, went along with her. Once she had us out from the shore, she moved up and down the boat watching us paddle. She made some seat changes but the most significant change was in how we stroke. We now use our hips and sit bones as pivot points. Our bottom arm is still straight on the hit but not so much on the exit. We will, she warned, probably end up with blisters on our butts for which she said the best treatment is to sun wearing a thong or... I was reminded of the movie Calendar Girls, where a group of middle aged women pose for tasteful but nude photos of themselves to raise money for cancer research. I wonder if our bare butts could raise some funds? Cheeky thought!!

We also practiced our starts and with the changes Kamini suggested, we really experienced much better timing, power and speed. So much more speed that we were able to practice two more starts than what she first suggested and still get Patricia back to shore in a timely manner. As exhausting as that effort was; it was also an exciting accomplishment. There was much more chatter as we brought the Doriana back up to the clubhouse than there had been on the way down. I wonder if we were all more worried about going out than we cared to admit. But in the end it was so worthwhile.

We had our first official pub night and it was quite lovely to relax and rehash the afternoon's adventure. I think we would have been just as happy to not have sat around quite so long but the food was slow in arriving. This is a dangerous thing when you have tired hungry women. Not because we were unreasonable, but more than one of us noticed that a couple of beers or in my case, wine could have sent us off to the Land of Nod. I was so glad I wasn't driving. Today, Monday, I am not sore but I certainly am tired (and happy). I'd say Paddles Up but don't think I can lift my arm.

#12 **Wednesday, April 23rd and Saturday, April 26th**

Usually I write about the week after Saturday's practice. This Saturday however, was our first regatta and Wednesday's practice pales in comparison. I know Diane suggested sitting on Lazy Susans to assist us with our pivot, I know it was a beautiful night and I know there was real regret when Brenda and Carol said they wouldn't be with us on Saturday. But it really was Saturday and our first race that was on our minds as we went through all our drills.

Deep Cove on that Saturday was an amazing sight. The park was crowded with canopies of competing teams. Side by side, paddlers of all ages, the young and the more experienced waited for their team to be called to the marshalling area. Sharon had arrived early to set up for us which was a real treat, letting us arrive later that morning. Most of us arrived a good hour before our first heat, just in time to see one of the dragon boats capsize.

There was some concern for the effect on novices witnessing this but for me, I guess I'm just too self absorbed and just wanted to get out and race. Not that I wasn't nervous, I really was but I have complete faith in our crew to keep us afloat. My pre race jitters were all to do with the competition and wanting to do well. We paddled extremely hard and well. So well, that if the two other boats in our first race had been disqualified for colliding, we would have won that heat. As it was, we all got to race again adding to our race experiences for the day and despite doing the race again we still did well.

The races were 250 m. and seemed over almost before they began except for the last race of the day. By then, I knew I had competed in 4 (5 if you count the re-race) heats. I didn't know if the salt I could taste was that of my own body or the salty brine from the cove. Both I imagine. Lynn was both paddler and drummer that day and did a great job and Anita was our steersperson. Deb and Orrie were our amazing coaches and Dorothy, my terrific paddling partner. Francoise was my personal coach, reminding me to keep my head up looking forward and across the boat where I could see Rosemary as stroke. As all good athletes do, we met at a local pub at days end to rehash our day and of course eat and drink. What a day!

#13 **Wednesday, April 30th and Saturday, May 3rd**

Another great night for paddling! Now we start preparing to race 500 m. Orrie paced us with her ocean going paddleometer. I think it's just a toy watch and she and Deb make up the distance. Because 500 m is really only twice as long as 250 m! It just seems so much more. Both Orrie and Deb introduced us to new drills. I particularly like the pyramid drill. Despite the increased time and distance we are paddling, the variations of the drill make the time go by quickly. We also did a number of timing drills and continue to practice our starts.

Saturday was cooler and somewhat rainy but a great temperature for paddling. It's hard to notice a bit of rain when there are so many other ways to get wet in a dragon boat, like two tugs sending huge waves our way. With Lynn steering and the rest of us following our coaches directions we were all quite safe if just a little wetter. But not nearly as wet however as when I changed sides for paddling and soaked Carol and myself.

Clearly, I need to strengthen my ability to paddle on the right. It's interesting that it was such a challenge, when initially that is the side I thought I would prefer. We continued with the new drills from Wed. night as well as old favourites, (coaches favourites, not ours necessarily) and by the end of the practice knew we had been working hard. Rosa said she felt she was like a galley slave on the old Roman ships, our coaches with their verbal whips standing over us. Coaches you know who you are and we love you anyway We even sang a brief refrain of 'We'd do anything for you Deb, anything. Yes we'd do anything, anything for you'. Well, Carol suggested we speak for ourselves.

The Saturday Sun paper had an article citing how people who are connected to nature are happier. I must say, I rarely feel happier than when I am out on the water with this crew, working hard, yes, but also seeing the geese with their new goslings, the shore at low tide covered with starfish shining like amethysts in the sun, our resident eagle watching from a perch high above us. It doesn't get much better than that.

#14 **Wednesday May 14th**

I know there are two paddling sessions missing, but in my ongoing war with the computer, I may be losing. Apologies, but some things have gone missing and even whether email works is a hit and miss affair. But paddling continues to be great!! I am glad to be working out on a regular basis, even if it isn't enough. Paddling 500 m. is exhausting right now. We have done some very cool drills that will improve our stamina and our timing. I particularly like the drill when we paddle with our eyes closed.

Our timing is very good and the sensation of paddling this way is difficult to describe. Focused as we are on the sounds of the paddles hitting the water, we seem to move through the water connected by the rhythm of our paddling. I find it incredibly powerful. We seem to have been blessed with very reasonable weather. Although Tuesday night had been miserable, by Wednesday when we paddled the weather was mildly cool and the water was like glass, until of course the tugs go by to give us experience in keeping our focus in the boat. It's a bit of a roller coaster of a ride but we managed well.



#15 Saturday May 17th The Bill Alley Memorial Regatta

It was our second experience in a regatta. The weather was amazing! Warm on shore but a cooling breeze as we paddled. We had four events in which to compete and all were very different due in part to the changing tides. The first event we sped through but the second event felt like paddling through wet cement. Apparently that was a consequence of the tide change. I sometimes despair of ever getting the stroke right, power at the right time, up, ups done properly, not soaking every one who sits around me and all those other details that are part of skilled paddling.

Dorothy, my sage paddling partner says these are normal reactions for the first year and over time I will feel more comfortable with paddling. We learned that testosterone beats estrogen every time and unfortunately for us, in the women's only race, estrogen also beat our estrogen (or lack thereof for those of us on estrogen blocking drugs). We did come in second and that is all I am saying about that race other than we absolutely gave it our all. I think the expression was 'paddle 'til you puke'! And I came close and then talked about wanting to train all year! Idiot!

The pub experience after was a wonderful way to end the day and the 12 hours of sleep that followed didn't hurt either.

Paddles Up

#16 **Wednesday May 21, 2008**

The weather man was wrong! It was not a terrible night weather wise but certainly not the cloudless night that had been promised. We worked hard on our drills in anticipation of Saturday and of course the Rio Tinto/Alcan festival in June.

Halfway through the practice, I again switched sides and it was much easier than the previous week. Interestingly, (to me anyway) my return on the right side is faster than on the left but digging in, is much more effective on the left. I really need to build up the strength on that left side. To future novices who may read this, I cannot stress enough the importance of working to build strength and stamina. Things done well are so much more fun than things done where one has any kind of regrets about one's performance.

A fun event of the night, besides the wine and great food, was the paddle tapping chant we (the novices) learned. Tap tap (saying Bar..net) Paddle twice (saying rocks rocks)

#17 **Saturday May 24, 2008**

WOW! Our third regatta and the weather was again beautiful. The day was exciting and I actually remembered to come home with my paddle instead of leaving it at a pub. This was the Women's Regatta and knowing that we would be paddling on a much more even paddling surface, i.e. no testosterone involved, I found the day so relaxed and so much fun. There were, of course, the pre race jitters and in some ways they were more intense because the outcome of the race would be more likely based on evenly matched skill and ability.

A very light hearted part of this regatta is the costumes; from "The Biker Chicks" (one crew member actually paddled in high heeled leather boots) to "The Pick Up Chicks" to our very own "Real Spice Girls," the costumes were terrific.

Our second race of the day was definitely the highlight of the day. We placed first in that heat with a more than respectable time. To me, we seemed to paddle evenly, with strength and the ability to give it even more when it really counted. It was incredibly exhilarating.

Kerry, a volunteer who was also at Deep Cove spoke to two of the AIAB teams just prior to the third race. His words honoured our journey and segued into the two teams singing the AIAB song. I don't know about others, but it brought tears to my eyes.

I sat out the third race and watched our team as they struggled to recapture the momentum of a very powerful start that was short circuited by mishaps within the first few hundred metres. Not to be deterred, the Barnet team gave it their all right to the finish line.

We ended a great day rafting all the AIAB crews for a photo shoot.

#20 **Wednesday, June 4, 2008**

The practice tonight seemed to be one of those "tough ones." The ones where your arms feel heavy and it takes longer to warm up and then just when you've warmed up you start to tire. Some practices just seem to go like that. But once again the weather was

reasonable and paddling conditions were good. Seeing a dog swimming out by where we were paddling was a bit of a shock. We were concerned he would have difficulty making it back to shore and were a bit distracted; however, he made it just fine. Probably had energy to spare.

Some of us again had the opportunity to sit as drummer and call out the drills. This is a lot of fun and breaks up the practice a bit. I certainly wasn't as smooth at transitioning the calling from one drill to the next as others of our crew. It is however a great experience, reinforcing the importance of timing and just experiencing the power surges when a Power 10 is called and what a start feels like.

I think we travelled further east in this practice than we have before (this from someone known to be directionally challenged.) And though the beauty of our surroundings changes little, it's always interesting to see what lies around the next bend. Just like we pushed the boundaries of our paddling venue, the conversations among us are also reaching into new territory as we talk a bit more about our scars and cancer experiences. The short bits of conversation strengthen the connections among us.

#21 Saturday, June 07, 2008

A great day to be on the water and we also had the company of other boats. We did some different drills today and practiced a rolling start. Carol our more experienced steersperson worked with Lynne (our novice steersperson) on how this happens and our coaches, as always gave very clear instructions, feedback and encouragement to us, the paddlers. At first, I was a little anxious but was more comfortable with each effort. In a race situation, I will be quite reliant on Dorothy (my pad partner) and others around me to get it right if we do have a rolling start. Going with the flow is not always one of my strengths. I do notice though that I am feeling physically stronger. I still do not enjoy paddling on the right side as I do from time to time. I do think however, that this change is good for the body and good for the crew. (Not necessarily when I do it, but just to be able to change sides if necessary for balance or whatever.)

Today was the 24-hour Relay for Life and in honour of a previous crew member Jean Henson, who passed away last year, we paddled for a minute in silence. This is not the first time Deb has had us take a moment to remember why we are here and it is always so poignant when she asks us to take a moment to remember.

#22 Wednesday, June 11, 2008

No tugs, no barges, no rain. The water was as smooth as glass. The practice was demanding. We have only three practices until Rio Tinto/Alcan and we worked hard tonight. I think we probably always do, but tonight our efforts seemed more intense. We have tasted victory and we want more, even though we are not at all competitive :-). We had two back-to-back races, pyramid drills, even, odds and every other drill we have ever done.

Deb had Jean's paddle with her, a gift from Jean's husband. The paddle was passed to different crew members to paddle with in memory of Jean. This was a very emotional moment for those who knew Jean and had paddled with her in previous years. It is these

kinds of experiences, as I have mentioned previously, that are also such an important part of our practices. It represents the juxtaposition of our strength and our frailty.

I'm not sure but I imagine those who knew Jean and had the opportunity to use her paddle had some special memories or private thoughts as we ended the practice. And maybe that's why we weren't as conscientious in getting the boat ashore. Because, we suddenly realized that poor Lynne had been left in the boat with no one holding the line and she was drifting out, away from the beach. Ever resourceful, she managed quite well to get the boat back within our reach and we did get her and the Doriana safely to shore.

#23 Saturday, June 14, 2008

Well it wasn't as sunny as predicted but it certainly warmed up later, or maybe it was just us. It was a strenuous practice. We practiced rolling starts again and I agree with Janice re: why it is a challenge for us. (At least for me...) We could be halfway through a stroke as we approach the start, when go is called and so don't start as powerfully... thus a little anxiety about when the "go" will be called. The inlet was busy today and we had some large waves with which to contend. In addition to the boaters, the tugs and barges there were also people collecting from crab traps and the family of geese were nearby a couple of times. The older geese surrounded the young ones when we were close which was quite interesting to see.

All our coaches 'drummed' today and had us do their favourite drills. With Orrie, we again paddled with our eyes shut. We are so much better at keeping in time than when she first had us do this drill.

The Power 5s and 10s is a standard for all the coaches but Brenda's voice yelling "Reach it out" while we complete these drills is often in my head, even when she isn't sitting in the drummer's seat coaching. And of course, with Deb, I hear her saying "C'mon you can do it, you can do anything for a minute" even when she has us paddling for 3 minutes or more. You can do anything for a minute has now become a personal mantra when ever I am doing anything challenging.

Today was also the "friends and family" paddle day. We had about 7 guests who joined us for a paddle after our practice and snack. Brenda, Deb and Laura put us all through our paces and the guests all got a taste of what our practices are like. They all seemed to enjoy themselves and it was certainly fun to have them join us.

I can't believe we only have one practice before Rio Tinto/Alcan. In fact I refuse to think about it.

#24 Wednesday, June 18, 2008

Our last practice before Rio Tinto. I can't believe it. It was a beautiful night. We worked hard practising power 10s, starts and focusing on stroke technique. Rosa V. and Renata, two alumnae joined us for a short paddle and then for snack afterwards. Despite how hard we worked, I really didn't want to stop that night. It has been such terrific season and I don't want it to end. It seems no matter how tired I was before a practice, being on the water with such a terrific crew was a balm to a sore body and sometimes tired spirit.

#25 “Rio Tinto”

I really don't want to write this last entry. It means the season has come to an end. It means I will miss the incredible camaraderie I felt every Wednesday night and Saturday morning. It also means however that we can recognize the results of all our efforts and we did well. We had great races on Saturday and Sunday and finished the Regatta with a Bronze medal. All that hard work paid off. But what was even more profound for me was the Breast Cancer Challenge Race on Sunday and the rafting of all the boats. There were many times during the season when gripped by a competitive fever I wanted to continue paddling all year, because it was important to win. But at the end of that race with all of us together, I realized that what mattered was that we were together. We had met the challenge of breast cancer, we had met the challenge of developing our physical strengths and abilities and we had met the challenge of developing a team. It has been one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. And so I pass the paddle – the paddle of the diary to the next year's novice. I hope you have a paddling partner like I did with Dorothy, and experience the coaching and camaraderie I experienced with Barnet.

Paddles Up!