

2015 Novice Diarist Michelle Righetti

Part I

Like millions of others making new year 's resolutions, I decided that this year I was going to try something new. I have a hubby, two busy teenagers and work part time, but I needed something that was "just for me ". I wanted to celebrate my health, my new lease of life, and to start making every day count.

Sure enough, one day at my regular Zumba class I noticed a wee lady wearing her AIAB t-shirt. It was the lovely Kulbinder, and she had me hooked from that day on. She talked of this great crew of amazing ladies who work hard at practice, socialize and succeed together. She talked of regattas, races, pub nights and pot luck parties and I realized.....THIS IS MY THING – I am totally in!

After training for six weeks clad in my new waterproofs and rubber gloves, I am feeling ready to get in the water. So excited about my new venture, I marked the date 21st March on the calendar--the big day, and my first ever paddling experience. I had no idea what to expect, but I was going to give it 100%. March 21st arrived, but the impromptu hand of Mother Nature has intervened. We arrived at Fort Langley with the rain pelting down, thunder rumbling across the lower mainland, and realized that the lightning strikes would be the deciding factor for cancelling that first practice. It was officially too dangerous to paddle.

I was so very disappointed I didn't even manage to get in a boat! But every cloud has a silver lining--we were all invited back to Anne's new home for breakfast for yet another chance to eat, drink and get to know this inspiring bunch of ladies known as FORTITUDE.

Roll on next practice; I might even get my paddle wet next time.

Part II

So; I am 7 weeks in and practices are going well; when I fall into bed after Wednesday nights practice, I actually dream of Juanita's voice instructing me to Reach / Power 10 / Hold the boat / and ultimately those sweet words "Let it Run "

Before we know it, Spring Knockouts have arrived: Saturday 9th May on a beautiful sunny day in False Creek. The night before, we receive one of Arleigh's wonderful inspirational emails. It suddenly hits home that this is the day we have been practicing for, and we must NOT let our wonderful team mates down. Everyone has been so encouraging and welcoming; making sure that we 4 novices feel like true members of the Fortitude Family.

When we arrive I am speechless at the whole event; the hordes of paddlers and tents, the stunning setting of False Creek. I remind myself how lucky I am to be here and experience this. The feeling of pride, positivity and gratitude, exudes from my very soul. I am so very lucky!

The adrenaline kicks in and the racing begins. While we are lined up waiting to load the boats, we have a sing song, 8 teams, all woman, sing "Que Sera Sera" and I look around at the beautiful city and the North Shore Mountains and every single one of these woman are smiling! I will always remember this day.

9 races later we are finally knocked out and it's time to go home. I leave False Creek with fabulous memories, and the ultimate souvenir; **a dragon bite on my bum !**