

Founder Profiles...in celebration of the Club's 50th year

LAWRIE AND AILEEN NEISH

written by Sue Dumont; first two photos by Colleen Shantz

New to boating and the SISC, I was excited to go and meet our first Commodore, Lawrie Neish and his lovely wife Aileen. And am I glad I did! It was truly inspirational to hear how this Scottish family took a leadership role in the Saltspring community while sharing their love of sailing, racing and constructing many boats, both full-sized and International One Metres.

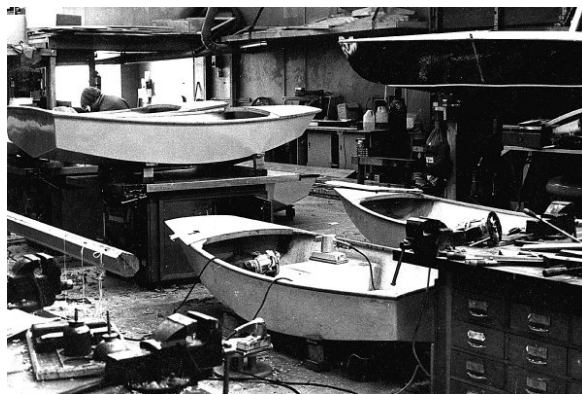


Warmly greeted by the couple and their two fox terriers, we enjoyed tea and scrumptious scones as we chatted about how they had ventured from Gareloch in Scotland, arriving on Saltspring via Langley in 1968. Lawrie wanted to add a couple of years of "foreign experience" to his teaching resume. And, happily, they are still thriving here. Their many accomplishments and commitment to our community have been recognized on the Artspring Wall of Major Contributors, with the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award, the Queen's Jubilee medals and Life Membership in the SISC.



Founder Profiles...Neish

At GISS Lawrie became well known for leaving behind a trail of cold cups of tea as he volunteered lunch hours and evenings to guide his Industrial Education students, male and female, in well organized teams to make 100 Sabots as well as 38 other yachts.



As the boats were completed, Lawrie and Aileen taught the children sailing, safety and care of the boats. Naturally, sailing with a purpose led to racing and the creation of the Saltspring Island Sailing Club.



Many hours were volunteered to organize races and regattas and to ensure the safety of the youth as they competed within BC, winning often. Club members won the BC Championship for under 13 years old for 10 consecutive years. Also benefitting from Lawrie's expertise and determination is the GISS Rowing Club. Lawrie continues to advocate for year round youth programs.



Racing runs in the Neish blood from both parents. Aileen's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed as we discussed organizing and winning the first Round Saltspring Race in 1974. After some squalls in the early part, *Clarion* had one of her best sails ever from Southey Point to the finish line at the Ganges Coast Guard dock in an hour and 20 minutes. *Ginger Tea* was along side and *Clarion* couldn't quite get over her quarter waves. Aileen was at the helm of *Clarion* as she crossed the finish line first. Second place Jack Langdon could be heard to utter, "Beaten by a woman! ... One minute you were riding our quarter wave and the next minute you were gone!"



Lawrie led work teams to refurbish existing docks and build more docks when he accepted the position of Commodore once again in 1989. He has been instrumental in writing the Early History of the SISC. Also he invested time and money into the culture of Saltspring by becoming a dedicated leader and doer for Artspring and Artcraft. Truly, a man of many talents is Lawrie—building and maintaining the firehall clock, building bus shelters, harps, docks, boats, garbage containers and furniture. Aileen confided to me that Lawrie would be the only person she would sail around the world with because he was so innovative and could solve any problem they encountered.



I am sure you can understand how impressed and thankful I am that Lawrie and Aileen shared with me stories highlighting their vision, leadership, motivation, ingenuity and determination. Without a doubt, Lawrie and Aileen have carved their "niche" in our Sailing Club and our entire Saltspring community. Thank you.

Above: Lawrie hiking out on Windsong, an International 10 Square Meter sailing canoe built by Martin Herbert's father Alf in 1967 as a Centennial Project. This is near where the Clubhouse is now located. Seconds later, Lawrie was standing on the centreboard, with the boat flat in the water (apparently very easy to do in these boats.) The world-wide speed limits for mono-hulls have been set in these boats. Lawrie was able to outpace a power boat.

Left: Jay Rozzano and Lawrie on Clarion, the boat Lawrie and his students built to teach sailing.