

This month I was fortunate to visit Captain Don Baxter, Master Mariner, and his lovely wife, Alicia. The two met when Don's family moved next door to Alicia's family in Vancouver. They were only 12 and 13 years old at the time. They have been together ever since and will be celebrating their 57th wedding anniversary later this year. Speak of teamwork! Congratulations!



Master Mariner is the highest grade of seafarer qualification and Don is licensed to and has captained boats of any size, any type, anywhere in the world. This esteemed designation reflects the highest level of professional qualification among mariners and deck officers.

Don's extensive career on the water began in 1958 when he joined the Canadian Navy. After his honourable discharge in 1963, Don joined BC Ferries. He retired in 1981 as master on the Long Harbour run. Then Don went up to the Arctic with Canadian Marine Drilling. When that company was taken over by Amoco in 1992 he took his ship to Singapore for a new contract around the South China Sea, Australia, Seychelles, Malaysia, and North Vietnam. Don retired from Amoco in 1995 but you can't keep a good sailor off the water. He managed and skippered the Gulf Islands water taxi with Alicia as his faithful deck hand for the next sixteen years.



To my great delight Don and Alicia shared their video from old 8 mm reel to reel recordings and many photos in the Club's archives to enlighten me about the start of our SISC including the building of our first dock. These stories highlight how the current spirit of volunteerism and teamwork grew from our humble beginnings.

In the early 1970's Don and other Salt Spring sailors docked at the Scott Point Moorage on Long Harbour. When that site was purchased by the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club for its outpost, the local boats needed to find a permanent home. Don remembers the day, with the winds out of the northwest at 30 knots, all the boats had to vacate immediately to Harbour's End Marina. When the moorage rates were going to be raised there, the first of many planning meetings for what would become SISC at our present location was held at the home of the Larsons.



Fig.3. The first planning meeting, held in the dining room at the Larson home, at which the decision to go ahead was made. Standing (rear left) ? (not Al Larson). Seated next to him is Bas Cobanli. Peter McMillan (standing), Carl Hoeller (standing), Cliff Carey (seated), Jim Sinclair (seated), Tom Butler-Cole (seated), Don Baxter (seated), Ken Last (back-view, seated), Roger Smith (side-view, seated), ? (seated)  
(Courtesy Kerry Butler)

The current property site cost \$70,000. The bank would loan the club \$30,000. For the remainder, some of these hard working and generous sailors decided to give the Club \$1000 or \$1500 debentures, interest free, not expecting any repayment. Don and Alicia's Club seniority number 0008 designates that they were the eighth persons to volunteer their debenture. They are the most senior members in our Club now. So it was a pleasant surprise when the debentures were reimbursed several years later, after the Club became solvent. The final \$10,000 was offered generously by Doug Thomas, and so the land was purchased.

Pilings (some donated by BC Ferries) were driven in professionally and the rest of the work was performed by diligent volunteers. Not all of the volunteers became members; some were just

so community spirited as to offer help when needed. Don and his deck hands would work their shifts at the BC Ferries and then come to the new site to work for 4 hours every day for the 4 months required to complete our first dock. Wives and children assisted wherever they could, sewing burgees, painting, making curtains and cleaning the clubhouse while trying to maintain normal family routines and meals. Alicia laughs as she remembers she covered essential clubhouse windows with frosted mactac so washrooms were not openly visible to the great outdoors.



Fig. 15. The convoy (stopped by police for over-height loads), awaiting the ferry back to SaltSpring  
(Courtesy Ken Last)

For the new floats, styrofoam from the Mainland was stacked high and loaded onto a convoy of at least 10 trucks that drew a police escort through the tunnel. Volunteers borrowed trucks if they didn't own one. Keeping spirits light, Jimmie Sinclair painted a "Salt Spring or Bust" sign on one of the overheight loads.





Fig. 13. Lift that shovel. Loading the aggregate (called 'Saturnalite') at Saturna Island. Volunteers are Dick Pattinson ?, Peter McMillan, Tom Butler-Cole, Cliff Carey, Jack Langdon, Glen Hampton, David Sprether, Richard Larson, Charlie Sampson  
(Courtesy Ken Last)

Aggregate from Saturna (Saturnalite) was used in the concrete for the floats as it was more buoyant than regular gravel. So another convoy of volunteers brought in the Saturnalite. The steel was gleaned by our volunteers from dismantled WWII radio antennae on Sidney Island.



Fig. 29. A raiding party. The club obtained permission (it is alleged) to dismantle World War II radio antennae located on Sidney Island. The figures are Ed Lacy, ?, and Peter Lake  
(Courtesy Kerry Butler)



Fig. 9. Levelling the surface using a screed rail, prior to rifting. Figures, clockwise, are Peter McMillan, Don Baxter, Tom Butler-Cole, Cliff Carey and Bob Hanson  
(Courtesy Richard Larson)

It took ingenuity as well as many hard working volunteers collaborating and planning as a team to gather and then assemble the resources required to build and install the docks of our Club.



Fig. 20. At those times when the tide was out, an A-frame was used to hoist a completed float off of the railway carriage. Then the carriage was removed and the float was lowered onto the tidal flat. After the tide came in the float was towed out to join the growing flotilla. The two individuals are Don Baxter and Tom Butler-Cole  
(Courtesy Richard Larson)

Don was pleased to say they were the first boat to tie up at the new dock in 1978.



Fig. 40. Seven sailboats, one power boat, and a run-about  
(Courtesy Kerry Butler)

From 1974-2010 Don enjoyed the thrill of Club racing, and I caught a glimpse of the speed, excitement and camaraderie as we watched the videos he took from his sailboat. Some of the trophies were donated by teammates in honour of the exceptional contributions of these Sailing Club pioneers. There is a room in their home devoted to the myriad trophies both he and Alicia have won for sailing and for archery, another of their exceptional talents. Alicia was asked once by a competitor during a Round Salt Spring race to mend a torn sail. The grateful sailor was then able to get back in the race and complete the course. Families would follow the local boats around the island during races, stopping at the Baxter's home, Fulford, Vesuvius, Southey Point and Fernwood Dock to catch sight of the boats. Every summer the whole Club would sail to Chocolate Beach for a lovely day-long picnic with their families. Lots of reason to celebrate the joys of sailing and the special friendships that were built and nurtured through long days of teamwork!



Fig 43. A beach party on Third Sister Island  
(Courtesy Kerry Butler)

Don and Alicia continue to be active members of our Club and enjoy leisurely sailing in local waters now in their Hunter 30 sailboat, Impulse. We all agreed we are lucky to live in this scenic playground with so many beautiful sights close at hand. And we, in the Club, are lucky to have such dedicated, experienced and resourceful founding members to demonstrate the volunteer leadership that has established and grown our Club (both its human resources and physical assets) so successfully over the past 50 years. Thank you, Alicia and Captain Don Baxter MM.