

ROGER AND KATHIE KIBBLE

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Written by Derek Lundy, June 2019

Helen of Troy induced King Agamemnon to launch a thousand ships. Roger and Kathie Kibble once owned six boats at the same time. Big difference. But still impressive for a couple of Canadian commoners. In fact, when they casually mentioned this fact, my reaction was: Who the hell owns six boats simultaneously? (Okay, three sailboats really; two of the six were a kayak and a rowboat, and one was a 28-foot powerboat. But still—three sailboats.) The answer is: people who live and breathe sailing, who treasure and nurture their adventurous and challenging time on the waters of the Salish Sea.

Even more impressive is the fact that Roger and Kathie's sailing and profligate fleet ownership took place in the interstices of their fast and furious lives at work and raising four children.

For Roger, work was big-time advertising. Long hours, high stress, vodka martinis at lunch, accounts like BC Tel, A&W, Bridgestone, Kelloggs. Seven days a week. He worked for the biggest agencies in the country, opened up the Toronto office for Montreal-based Grey Advertising, moved to Vancouver to work for Baker, Lovick, broke away from them in 1982 to open his own firm, Creative Solutions, and built it into a formidable agency, still handling big accounts—Toshiba, Castrol—still long hours each day, seven days a week.

“It was like *Madmen*,” he says.

How do you fit racing small boats into a life like that? Well, you just do. Roger and Kathie kept their sailing boats at the Salt Spring Sailing Club even while living in Vancouver. “He always made the weekend race,” says Kathie. Somehow Roger found the time to compete, with his kids as crew, in “Gretha”, a 20-foot, gaff-rigged wood sloop, or later in “Beowulf”, a Marieholm 26, a full-keeled boat that usually lagged behind the fleet—although he won the 1994 Round Salt Spring in it with his daughters as crew, as he recalls. (His firm sponsored the race for its first four years.) Then he acquired “Electra”, his sleek Aphrodite 101 (which he still sails today), and began to win races more often. His sons couldn't believe he'd actually bought a fast boat.



***Above:** Roger and his daughters Aimee and Wendy after winning the Round Salt Spring Race together in 1994 in "Beowulf". **Below:** Roger and his cousin Bob from Ottawa in 1982, with fellow Club members (including Tom Butler-Cole and Kerry Butler), on the podium for Round Salt Spring.*



Roger & Kathie Kibble

When Roger sails, he races. That's where the joy is, the rush. Making the boat go as fast as possible every moment. It's serious business; you go out to win. He gets bored unless he's pushing hard. This drive to battle, to joust, to strive in contest lies deep in his bones. He used to race cars in the U.K., and in Montreal after he'd immigrated. He built cars, hammered them around racecourses, in rallies, on ice with studded tires. But all that time, for some reason, he was also fascinated by boats. He had raced dinghies in the UK and in Montreal. Gradually, water displaced land. Boats were safer and much cheaper, and the Kibble fleet began to assemble.



Above: the Kibble family on holiday in 1978 with "Gretha".

Meanwhile Kathie was running her own version of a full life, brisk at best and never far from hectic. There was the looking-after of the four children of course—that can be a little time-consuming. And then there was her passion for the theatre that drew and fascinated her, not the front the audience sees, but the staging and design of it. She'd loved it as a child, volunteering backstage in school plays. Later in Vancouver, she worked on operatic and theatre productions. She was

good and people knew it. Vancouver-based Goh Ballet asked her to paint and design sets for them.

Finally, when the kids had left home, she felt free to go to UBC to study theatre and set design. She was there for four years and loved it. Then, she became seriously ill. It took three or four years for treatment and recovery and after that, she just couldn't get back to the intensity of creative work. If only she'd begun the launch of a professional career twenty years earlier. But that's how life goes. On Salt Spring though, she decided to just enjoy herself, and she has been happy here.

Roger and Kathie were in at the beginning of our club. Soon after it had been inaugurated by Laurie Neish and Bas Cobanli in 1974, Kathie's father, Wayne Pearce, a retired RCAF officer, found the club's current location and organized its purchase. Roger and Kathie became members in 1979; Roger has been a mainstay of the club's racing group ever since.

Some things are always lost along the way. In the beginning, the founders and early members of the club, as with any human grouping, necessarily had a camaraderie, a close and affectionate affinity. But this couldn't last. The early passion became diluted as new members were admitted, numbers grew, people joined who had missed the early joyful days of the club's creation, the enthusiasms of volunteer communal dock-building, the commandeering of a clubhouse, of making a new association of like-minded racing sailors on Salt Spring Island.

So the character of the club changed. It's not necessarily worse; it's just different. For founders and first members, there is always a kind of sorrow at the fading of that early pure fellowship. Roger and Kathie feel that too. It's inevitable; it's how life goes.

But there are benevolent continuities too. Their children are avid sailors. Jeffrey joined the navy and, for four years, commanded the sail training vessel "Oriole". Steven is a race skipper on the fast "Godzilla". Aimee, now a mother herself, loved sailing because it taught her resilience, she says. You realize when things are tough, that you can make it through. You have a sense of accomplishment. You know you can handle whatever life throws at you.

When Steven was young, Kathie recalls, Roger would take him and his boys' choir out in "Gretha" in the evening. The boys would sometimes sing together, an impromptu breaking out of song. Their voices, high and pure, would carry out over the darkening water, a beautiful sound.

"Beautiful, yes," Roger agrees, and smiles.