

# Welcomeship not jinxed, just unlucky

One train ride in town cost the Welcomeship owners, Captain Jack and Norma Gurnie and Richard and Joan Johns close to \$40,000. When the fire alarm sounded out on that late day in May, the owners of the Welcomeship were enjoying an evening dinner at a nearby hotel.

A message from one of the staff to the effect that the Marina's old shed was on fire and spreading, sent the group running from the room and into their cars. The ride to the wharf was probably the longest one they'd ever taken in the city, Norma Gurnie said later.

Their race against time ended with dismayed exclamations when they saw the barrier between themselves and their beloved boat. A train moving relentlessly forward blocked their rescue.

Norma Gurnie said they and the second group of firemen, arriving at the same time, could see that for most of the 10 minutes it took the train to cross, the boat was untouched by fire. On the other side, however, firemen were desperately trying to stop the flames from spreading to the boat.

Fireman Bill Lynch, by this time, cut the bow, breast and power lines, but couldn't move the boat without the key. By this time the stern had caught fire and burnt the smaller stern line through which is why the boat came loose, said Mrs. Gurnie. She also said that if Mr. Lynch hadn't cut the lines, 600 gallons of fuel on board would have

blown up. Nearby were the Lakehead Sailing Club's sailboats and many spectators watching the frenzied activity. The owners of the Welcomeship had by this time given up hope of saving their boat and retreated. Son-in-law of the of the Gurnies', Bob Law, was at the stern and pumping out the contents of all eight fire extinguishers onto the flames. Now she had drifted away from the shed onto the opposite land-arm towards the sailboats.

It was Ray Bougie, captain of the Ingrid S. tugboat who came to the final rescue and pulled the Welcomeship in and away from the sailboats.

The Gurnies' and Mr. Johns said most of the stern, with its life-saving equipment, was charred badly and listing in the water. The interior was rife with smoke, the upper deck seats, windows and doors were melted through.

The Welcomeship needed an entire coat of paint, all the shore facilities including the unloading ramp for wheelchairs, life jackets and seats had to be replaced. After one week of 24-hour work shifts at the Port Arthur Shipyards, the repairs were finished and the Welcomeship opened on schedule on May 20.

Asserted Norma Gurnie, "that shed has been a potential fire hazard for years. Everyone knew this would happen eventually." She said that with the shed gone, it has become more difficult to

land because of the wind factor.

Richard Johns, the most quiet of the three, said he felt only "anger and frustration at not being able to save the boat as they waited at the tracks.

Captain Jack, aside from feeling the same frustration, said he was amazed at the number of people who wanted to help paint and offered to work on the clean-up details. Mrs. Gurnie

added that "people were really concerned, as if the Welcome were their own."

Last year, they were flooded out during peak season; this year, the fire; next year all they hope for, say the Gurnies' and the Johns', is a normal, eventless, four months of operation. They refuse to allow any thought that the Welcomeship might be "jinxed." Just unlucky, they say.



These photographs taken by Richard Johns, strictly for insurance purposes, not fond memories by any means, he says. After the fire of May 13, Captain Jack Gurnie crestfallen as he looks at the damage to the stern of the Welcomeship. Upper deck seats [second photo], windows and doors were melted through.

PULL OUT

## Activities planned

A variety of summer activities have been planned for children at the Arthur Street Branch of the Thunder Bay Public Library.

Each week from July 3 through August 25 will see puppet shows, pre-school story hours, and crafts for all ages. There will also be special

events including a Yoga Workshop, Magnus Youth Theatre presentations, and Photography Session.

Please contact the Children's Department of the Arthur Street Library for further information on dates, times and activities.



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