

NOSTALGIA

“You know I think sometimes it would be a good thing if we could exchange some of our future to relive our past” Valerie said this to me a few weeks’ ago as we were leaning on the rail of the fence around the raised patio of the Bluffers Park Yacht Club clubhouse.

The view was of parkland, water around the island the clubhouse is on facing the channel out to Lake Ontario. To the rear, the majestic Cathedral Bluffs rise hundreds of feet into the sky. We were here to celebrate the 25th birthday of the club and as an Honorary Life Member and a Past Commodore we were guests of the club.

The memories flooded back as they always do when we visit, meet old friends and become acquainted with newer members. The club’s unofficial motto is the ‘Best Kept Secret on the Lake’. In my view, aside from the magnificent setting, the facilities and more importantly the members, make the motto true.

Valerie and I joined in 1982 as we prepared to start a new life together. I had decided that I wanted something entirely different in my life, besides a new wife and had joined the Habourside Sailing Club in Toronto harbour to learn how to sail. After qualifying I joined the club and sailed around Toronto harbour and the islands in the club’s bluenose – 23 foot, full keel sailboats.

We purchased a 25 ft. C & C boat in Hamilton, had various modifications made to it and began to look for a yacht club to call home. We heard about Bluffers Park and went to see it.

At that time, the ‘park’ was a vast construction landfill site along the base of the Bluffs to stop the erosion. The Conservation Authority had designed and built it with plans for a park at each end, a marina along the west shore and an island to hold three yacht clubs and a Dry Sailors (they park their boats on land not at docks it doesn’t mean they don’t drink!). These yacht clubs were to be ‘self-help’ clubs which meant the members did the work.

Bluffers Park Yacht Club in 1982 consisted of a construction site, two truck trailers (with the wheels removed) a Bell Construction Truck of unknown age and a pile driver constantly pounding piles into the lake bottom to form the supports for the docks.

We joined and aside from a modest fee I was committed to 60 hours a year of work. I can tell you that one of the fastest ways to meet your fellow members is to spend Saturday and Sunday in a trench laying in the water, sewage, electrical and telephone services.

Valerie still chuckles over the fact that she brought my lunch down three days in a row (a long week-end) and I was in the same spot, in the same trench. As amateurs we

had covered the trench up before all the lines were in and had to dig them up again, twice! I can hear you say – don’t ask!

In those early years not much sailing was done but once the 160 docks were installed and the piles driven for the new clubhouse, members could find time on weekends and indeed during the week to go off sailing.

I must tell you of the first cruise. A number of members were talking of sailing across the lake to Wilson NY then to Youngstown NY and across the river to Niagara on the Lake on the following day. It was a three day week-end, except that Valerie and I had commitments for the holiday Monday, so we decided to go alone over to Niagara on the Lake. We were lucky to find a spot on the wall outside the fabrication plant to tie up since Niagara on the Lake is one of the busiest yachting destinations on the lake. Subsequently we reserved a spot in the yacht club there before heading over.

As we were sitting enjoying just sitting a boat we recognized from the club pulled up and circled shouting about rafting up to us so they could go shopping – to the liquor store. It was a slightly bigger than our 25 footer but OK. By mid-afternoon there were 8 boats from Bluffers Park, the 8th being a 45 footer. The owner of the large boat loaned us a 4 ft fender to take some of the shock between us and the dock. We had a great time but the line of boats tended to swing slightly to the north due to the current from the Niagara River and the Falls.

Next morning we had to leave so a great conference took place on the dock – how to ease the line of 8 boats out so we could back out and then refasten them to the dock. It was done with much arguing, yelling and rushing about while we just sat ready to flee when room was made for our escape. As we backed out the strangers on the boat behind us said “Wow – how big were you when you went in?” Without a pause Valerie said “38 feet.”

This was one of the incidents we laughed about at the 25th birthday party. Sailing and the Yacht Club played a large role in our lives until we retired in ’93. For years we used to take a month’s holiday in summer, sail around the lake and always visited Kingston and Picton where we stayed at Harry Smith’s Picton Cruising Club. It was probably the major reason for us moving here since we had fallen in love with the County and the people.

We always think of presents at a birthday party and fortunately we had a unique one to give the club. When I was Commodore we commissioned a local artist in the Beach where we lived to paint a water colour of the club. It was 1988 and has hung in our home since. We presented it to the club and before we left they were showed us the spot where it would hang.

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