

Conibear Rowing Cub History

Originally performed in 1991, reformatted in 1998

The “Dick’s Chick” is a symbol still honored among those members who have been around long enough to remember the club’s beginnings. The following story of Conibear’s origins was told in the form of a historical play performed in 1998 in Jane Hardin’s living room. It was written and told in honor of the special Chick we were all anticipating, Leslie Selle and Peggy’s Tosdal’s baby Natalie. The bold names refer to the women who played the original parts and you must imagine the staging directions. Come and sit.....it all began like this:

IN THE BEGINNING, until 1981, there was little light in the world of Master’s Women’s Rowing. Here in the Northwest, the few women who did row were grads of Eastern College programs or the even fewer graduates of the UW Women’s Crew which didn’t even give letters until 1975. Those women trained and competed with the only show in town, Lake Washington Rowing Club, and had little local competition, having to go to Portland or Vancouver BC or stage their own regattas here. There was “No Room for Adults” at the Parks Department’s only rowing facility at Green Lake. There were no small rowing clubs anywhere else.

But, in 1981, the dark clouds parted when Dick Erickson, Head Men’s Coach and Rowing Director of the nationally renowned UW Husky Crew had returned from Henley and was confronted by two women at the Seattle Yacht Club bar with a dare:

Carol Mast as *Sally Laura and Lou Bradley*: “Why, you think you could teach anyone to row!”

Robin Bookie as *Dick Erickson*: “Well yeah, In fact I could even teach you old ladies!”

AND SO IT WAS, that on blustery winter mornings beginning late March of 1982, a handful of determined women from Seattle, Meydenbauer Bay and Rainier Yacht Clubs turned out at the UW for six weeks, training for a 500 meter race in Portage Bay on the Friday before Opening Day, traditionally held the first Saturday in May. In ‘83 and ‘84 SYC invited Tyee, Queen City, Seattle Corinthian, Tacoma, and Royal Vancouver Yacht Clubs to send women’s crews to the Opening Day races. You can imagine how busy the UW’s Conibear Shellhouse must have been with 150 Yacht Club women in various versions of rowing costume...

Mary Joy (MBYC), **Joann Aberle** (SYC), **Priscilla Fitzhugh** (CYC), **Randy Pratt** (SYC)
dressed neatly, fixing hair and touching up makeup, as if driving around in a car.

Complete with matronly jewels, coiffured hairdos and elaborate efforts at maintaining a sense of style while protecting manicures. It was during this era that the program acquired the name “Dick’s Chicks”...from the old geezers who served as parking lot attendants at the UW. We certainly felt like chicks in the barnyard, following Coach Erickson around. Every novice knows the feeling...

All above driving up to parking attendant, driver rolling down window with quarters in hand

Lois Kipper in yellow foul weather gear, carrying UW Parking Carpool lot sign “Oh, yeah, you must be some o’ them Dick’s Chicks” *Ladies tease back good-naturedly. Boo a little, laughing.* “Ooooh, we’re late! Coach won’t be happy! Tee Hee!”

Those wild and crazy women painted the Montlake Cut with their nickname in bright pink, and decorated the old floating shack ...

Mary, Joann, Priscilla, Randy *with paint brushes, flowers, frilly curtains, and pink flamingos* "Oh, what fun!"

In the boggy waters out in front of the Husky crew house with pink paint, plastic flowers, lace curtains... and topped it off with a flag flying a witch on a broomstick.

WELL, the Huskies hated it. And after they repainted the floating shack dayglo orange with camouflage stripes, the flamingos were stolen as trophies. And those flamingos were targets of capture between the Huskies, the Cal Berkeley Crew, and those early Dick's Chicks for quite some time. That's the reason Seattle Rowing Club's mascot is a bright pink flamingo. Really!

NOW, until the spring of '84, the women's rowing program shut down after the first Saturday in May after the terrifying spectacle of racing 750 meters down the boat lined, spectator-packed Montlake Cut. In fact, simply finishing in one piece seemed a lot more important than winning. But in June of 1984, Coach Erickson brought the Yacht Club women back together for an exhibition race at Green Lake during the Women's Collegiate Nationals and again in September for the Can-Am Masters Challenge at Seward Park, and this time, Erickson mixed the Yacht Club women together at random in three boats just for fun... kind of like marching band at half-time.

SOMETHING about the Can-Am must have clicked, because nine of those Yacht Club women got calls in October to come back to Conibear Shellhouse for training... and Erickson had a surprise for them... a real rower. It was big strong blond and outspoken Kari Hannevold, who had begun rowing in Norway in her teens and convinced them that if they could just keep up with her, they would not only finish, but COULD WIN! Through sheer force of her conviction, the late bloomer Yacht Club combo eight raced in the 1984 Frostbite Regatta. Here's an actual scene, direct from the Green Lake restroom during the '84 Frostbit...

Linda Bush, Sioux Beaudry *wearing Green Lake juniors' gear* "So you ladies are, like, out here to get some exercise and fresh air? Like, get away from your kids?"

Carol *in CRC tank* "NO WAY! We're here to kick some butt, just like you!"

AND THEY DID... on age-correction over a shocked LWRC crew. And the next day, rowing exhibition as novices, they also won the Head of the Lake on age-corrected time, actually passing the Gonzaga women's crew...

Randy *showing original light blue tank top*

Kari *showing the Head of the Lake "Horseshow" ribbon*

Just before the finish. They won shirts from Gonzaga, and Kari put hers on in the middle of the pancake breakfast in the Husky dining room with the rowing community all around enjoying the display of her Norwegian fishnet underwear, sans bra.

Randy *showing Gonzaga trophy tank*

The race, however, had been no exhibition, but the beginning of what eventually became Conibear Rowing Club.

AROUND THE SAME TIME, one of the Yacht Club women who worked in advertising set up a photo ad shooting for Patagonia, and she asked nine of the Opening Day women to model a jacket for the Patagonia catalogue. They got to keep the jacket as their "fee" for modeling...

Randy and Robin showing red Patagonia jacket

In that long-ago master' rowing world, wearing the same color t-shirt made a team look overdressed, and the jackets gave visual identity to the group it might not have had otherwise. Actually the garment was comfortable, durable and just right for rowing. Naturally, Patagonia discontinues it after that season, and it took SIX YEARS to find a replacement.

Randy and Robin showing new jacket

THAT small group briefly became the Women's InterClub Crew, but without membership in USRowing, had to race at NW Regionals as Mt. Baker, an omen perhaps, of things to come. Nonetheless, the rowing community knew them as "Dick's Chicks." Yeah, they knew us...

Lois, Mary, Joanne, Robin, Irma Erickson, Randy, Priscilla, Kari in old yellow tank with cooler, tablecloth, champagne, glasses, treat, yakking. "Oooh, wasn't that a fun race! I'd like to do it again!" "I think I broke a nail" More champagne?"

BY THEN, there were 15 or 20 of us...widely seen as a bunch of rowdy women who celebrated each win...or loss, what the hey!...with champagne and elaborate treats. We stood out like a sore thumb amongst the rest of the rowing world slugging back the bran muffins and bananas.

Robyn walking past in LWRC shirt, eating banana, looking on critically

WE HAD no idea how to rig, unrig, or load boats. Why, those darling Husky men and women did it for us! What a bunch of bimbos! We simply didn't know any better, but we DID know how to party, and we celebrated with "Chick" mementos, now valuable collector's items, all decorated with Randy Pratt's 1984 yellow chick design, an adaptation of the Bon Ami logo.

All above... display Chicks logo on wineglasses, mugs, glasses, pins

THIS GROUP has always been cheeky, and the nickname was always controversial. In response to a query to the Times by the National Organization for Women, regarding our nickname as printed in an article on the sports page, here's a quote from a subsequent Seattle Times article: Randy Pratt (winner of the C Single at the '91 Maters' Nationals) "We're comfortable with ourselves and where we stand as women. We love that name; it's catchy and it certainly gets a lot of response, but if women are going to lose their sense of humor...over something like a name, then, well, what is there..? "

THE six-week Yacht Club Opening Day women's program continued through the spring of '85, but in the meantime, the boats became mixed men/women and the entire situation grew awkward and un-wieldy. So the UW Athletic Dept. invited the whole affair to ...ROW ELSEWHERE!!!!

SO, a few who were last B employees established the now-defunct Boeing Rowing. One group of women who'd had children at Lakeside School prevailed upon that institution's rowing program and established Martha's Moms. Several women from the SYC most of whom were early CRC members, organized a major rowing program around two new Pocock 4+'s, although continuing to compete in 8+'s with Conibear Rowing Club.

FOR the rest, it was a rude awakening, being cast out of comfy Conibear Shellhouse, and remember, THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR ADULTS in the Seattle Parks Dept. Rowing Program at Green Lake. Fortunately, the Mt. Baker Rowing and Sailing Center opened for business in June of '85, and as Coach Erickson had been consulted widely during all phases of boathouse design and construction, we were among the first adults to row there, where we have trained ever since.

WE turned loose of the Yacht Club orientation in 1986, when 25 women and 3 male members chose to become Conibear Rowing Club. The search was on for new talent and boy did we find it. We lucked out in a big way when LWRC star

Martha Goodlett (*stand up and do a "Rocky" salute*)

jumped ship and gave Conibear its first real engine room. We shamelessly raided from the best of Mt. Baker's women

Dianne Cox, Michelle, Patty Burke, Barb, Linda Lewis, Susan, Leona (*stand and take a bow*).

We tried recruiting experienced rowers at regattas and rowing demonstrations, with a newsletter masthead "Fast Friends" first used on a flier at Conibear booth in 1986 at the brand new Chandler's Cove Rowing Center. And we dragged our soccer playing and running friends to novice programs in mixed boats at both Mt. Baker and Green Lake, hoping they wouldn't be turned off by the experience until they qualified for Conibear. We wanted the best!

Jane Hardin, Anne, Sioux Beaudry, Fine Gelfand *stand up and wave modestly*

After realizing how differently men and women approach a novice class (guys honking on every stroke, women struggling for set and finesse). We wised up and began our own spring novice classes. Grow your own!

All CRC novice class grads *take a bow*

OFFSHOOTS of the original Opening Day Masters rowing boom, locally, include the previously mentioned crew programs at Seattle Yacht Club and Martha's Moms. Parks Department Masters program have developed at Everett, Renton, Vashon Island, and Green Lake in Seattle. Elsewhere, a surge of interest in existing but inactive masters rowing clubs has sprung up in San Diego, Marin County, CA, Miami, Austin, and elsewhere across the country. None of those areas had masters' women's rowing programs, much less competition, until after Conibear appeared at the '86 San Diego Crew Classic to challenge ZLAC in a master's women's race. And, oh yes, we won...Great medals, the say "WINNER"!

Mary, Robin, Randy, Carol *show San Diego medals*

SO YOU CANT imagine a world without rowing competition? Here's a prime example: ZLAC is a century old San Diego rowing club originally founded in 1892 by women (named Zulette, Lena, Agnes, and Caroline) but which had become an exclusive hereditary social club with a boathouse on Mission Bay. They sponsored a junior program, did volunteer work for the crew classic, had bridge parties, luncheons, and fundraisers until we came on the competitive scene. Now they are a healthy club with all kinds of people rowing there.

What a contrast: this year's (1991) Masters Nationals at Austin, TX attracted several hundreds of competitors from scores of clubs. What a change from the picture in 1982 when the number of

masters rowers was not recorded by USRowing because it was such a minor factor in the membership of the association! It could be that the half-joking date given Dick Erickson in 1981 has propelled more people onto the water holding oarblades than any other promotion of the sport. Dick's Chicks, which chose to become Conibear Rowing Club, is given credit for setting off the boom in masters rowing in the definitive historical volume, "The Story of World Rowing", written in 1992 by Christopher Dodd, the *Manchester* (England) *Guardian* rowing correspondent and editor of Britain's *Regatta* magazine. The little Conibear Chick has come a long way since Randy swiped her off the Bon Ami cleanser can, a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of the way each cluster of novices feels, following their all-knowing coach around as the magic of the oar is passed along.

A look at our nation's flag tells a story of change. The field of stars is altered each time a new state is adopted to the union, and may change again should Puerto Rico become our 51st state. The thirteen red and white stripes echo the original 13 English colonies, colonial status we rejected emphatically with the Revolutionary War. Still, those 13 stripes are reminders of our origin, much as the Chick echoes our Conibear history.